

## THE SOVIET FORM OF POPULAR GOVERNMENT

Throughout their great and glorious history, the Soviets of Working People's Deputies have been a striking embodiment of socialist democracy.

As the political foundation of the USSR, the Soviets carry out their multifaceted work in the interests of the working people, relying on their activity, support and initiative. That Soviet deputies and all those who work in various organisations associated with Soviet activities comprise virtually a quarter of the working population demonstrates the unity of the ordinary people with the Soviets.

New and important measures have been carried through in recent years to extend greatly the powers of the Soviets, and to intensify their influence on the economy and culture.

Readers abroad have shown a keen interest in the day-to-day functions of the Soviets, as is apparent from the numerous letters sent to Progress Publishers. It is in response to these requests that the present book was published.

The book was compiled under the direction of V. M. Chkhikvadze, Corresponding Member of the USSR Academy of Sciences, Director of the USSR Academy of Sciences Institute of State and Law. Contributors include the following experts on Soviet state law and the organisation of Soviets:

assistant professors M. A. Shafir and Y. N. Umansky, candidates of law B. V. Chernov, V. M. Koldayev and O. Y. Kutafin.

The book describes the emergence and development of the Soviets, their distinguishing features, and the practical work of the USSR Supreme Soviet, the Union and Autonomous republican Supreme Soviets and local Soviets.

Principal Editor  
V. M. CHKHIKVADZE,  
Corresponding Member  
of the USSR Academy  
of Sciences

# THE SOVIET FORM OF POPULAR GOVERNMENT

PROGRESS PUBLISHERS

MOSCOW

1972



Translated from the Russian by JAMES RIORDAN

Edited by MURAD SAIFULIN

Designed by ANATOLY SMELYAKOV

СОВЕТЫ—ОРГАНЫ НАРОДОВЛАСТИЯ В СССР

На английском языке

First printing 1972

Printed in the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics

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## PREFACE

The Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, the first socialist state of workers and peasants in history, covers an immense area of 22,400,000 kilometres and has a population (in 1970) of 241,748,000. This vastly multinational population cohabits a single union state on a completely voluntary, equal and fraternal basis.

Because the USSR is a nation of working people it does not, nor can it countenance any form of exploitation, social oppression or legal inequality. In socialist society all human relations are founded on the cordial co-operation and mutual assistance of free and equal working people. All authority and national wealth belong to the constituent members of the Soviet community—the workers, collective farmers and intellectuals.

Social production, based on socialist ownership of the instruments and means of production, is exclusively employed to enhance the overall power of the USSR and to improve the material and cultural standards of the Soviet people. "Everything for the sake of man, for the benefit of man" is the motto proclaimed in the Programme of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, the motive force of Soviet life. These words appropriately underlie the activities of all government and non-government organisations.

In the half century of its existence socialism has demonstrated the remarkable ability to organise rationally the labour of millions of people



and to coordinate the efforts of divergent social groups and workers in town and country for tackling common tasks. It is in the nature of socialist society increasingly to draw together the social and political interests of the industrial workers, the farming community and the intellectuals.

Immediately after the Great October Socialist Revolution the new government firmly established a very broad, representative and just democracy. The revolution-inspired government by Soviets opened up extensive opportunities for the meaningful day-to-day participation of the working people in running state, economic and public affairs. Life's creators had become its masters. The people who created all material and spiritual wealth—the hewers of coal and ore, the smelters of metal, the producers of lathes and machinery, the tillers of the soil—were now in command. So it is natural that the hammer and sickle, crossed in symbolic handclasp, should become the national emblem of the young Soviet republic. They symbolised the indissoluble alliance of workers and peasants, an alliance spearheaded by the workers by virtue of their being the most advanced and politically conscious class.

Soviet government is government of the people and for the people. Its power is inherent in the awareness and active participation of the mass of the population.

By its very nature the new society undeviatingly extends the social basis of the socialist state. "When socialism has been completed and the entire nation has firmly taken socialist positions, the working class has been pursuing its class struggle in close alliance with the collective farmers and working intellectuals against international imperialism and bourgeois and petty-bourgeois ideology. The state of proletarian dictatorship then becomes the political organisation of the whole nation under the guidance of

the working class led by its vanguard—the Communist Party."

The socialist state of the whole people rests on the support of all working people, on their highly conscious organisational discipline and serves as the chief instrument for building communism. It embodies the interests and the volition of the entire nation, of all classes and sections of socialist society.

The Soviets of Working People's Deputies, an all-embracing system of fundamentally new representative institutions, have proved their worth over the years of Soviet government. Because they constituted the country's political foundation, the Soviets gave their name to the world's first workers' state: the Soviet socialist state. But more than that. They have demonstrated their tremendous creative and revolutionary potency, being the most explicit expression and personification of socialist democracy. They are the most simple, most democratic and, at the same time, the most sovereign and effective system of representative institutions the world has ever known.

Presided over by the Supreme Soviet of the USSR, the uniform system of Soviets comprises 15 Supreme Soviets of the Union Republics, 20 Supreme Soviets of the Autonomous Republics, 111 regional and territory Soviets, eight regional Soviets of the autonomous regions, ten Soviets of the national areas, more than 2,500 district Soviets and over 45,000 village, township and city Soviets of Working People's Deputies. Altogether, they engage more than two million elected representatives and, in addition, over 25 million activists.

The Soviet state is consistent to Lenin's maxim that the people who run the country should be those represented in the Soviets.

By their very nature, the Soviets are the economic and political agencies of the working people and of the widest genuinely popular socialist de-

mocracy; they combine government and non-government functions, since they are the sovereign bodies of the state and, at the same time, the most widely-based organisations embracing all sections of the working people. Furthermore, they are intrinsically internationalist bodies in that they represent the many nations and nationalities inhabiting the USSR.

As the Soviet Union progresses, it is able to extend socialist democracy even further, boost the role of the Soviets in a variety of social spheres and perfect the ways and means by which they perform their functions.

The present book describes the birth and development of the Soviets, reveals the salient features of their functioning and assesses the practical effects of their activities.

Clearly, in a work of this nature, there will be a number of issues touched on only briefly. The authors have, however, drawn on much factual and legislative material to highlight the essentials: the socialist democratism of the Soviets ensuring popular sovereignty, and their nature as working institutions. They firmly believe this above all characterises the Soviets as a treasure-house of the epoch-making experience of the revolutionary democratic creativity by working people; the Soviets have enabled the Soviet people more fully to enjoy the fruits they have won and more perceptively to appreciate the advantages of the socialist way of life.

## CHAPTER 1

### ESTABLISHMENT AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE SOVIETS

The years that separate contemporary Soviet society from that fateful day in 1917 when the workers overthrew their exploiters and ushered in an era of universal revolutionary renovation have thoroughly and severely tested the viability of the October Revolution and Marxist-Leninist philosophy. They have been palpably embodied in the triumph of socialism and communist construction in the USSR, on the one hand, and in the development of the world socialist community, the powerful scope of the labour movement and the gains of the national-liberation struggle, on the other. Today, it can justifiably be said that "Marxism-Leninism has captured the minds of hundreds of millions of people in the world, and the communist movement has become the most influential political force of modern times".<sup>1</sup>

The present generation of Soviet citizens have a legitimate pride in their nation, it being the pioneer workers' state, and profound respect and sincere admiration for their fathers and mothers, their elder brothers and sisters who performed the truly historic feat of paving the way for a new radiant and just life for the whole of humanity. "Our people will always revere the memory of Bolshevik-Leninists, the heroes of the socialist revolution, the Civil War and the Great Patriotic War. The courageous builders of the new factories and collective and state farms during the period of the first five-year plans, all those who built socialism and fortified the might of the world's first socialist state will never be forgotten."<sup>2</sup>



MARX AND ENGELS  
ON THE FORMS  
OF PROLETARIAN STATE

On October 25 (November 7), 1917, an armed insurrection of workers and peasants, soldiers and sailors led by Lenin's Communist Party carried through a revolution in Russia and replaced the government of landowners and capitalists by a dictatorship of the proletariat. This marked the inception of a state form new to history—the socialist republic of Soviets. In fact, the Soviets represented that long sought-after mode of government in which the first socialist nation was embodied.

Marxism-Leninism attributes great importance to state form; it asserts that form cannot be an end in itself, since it is always imbued with a certain content that ultimately depends on society's material conditions. In their study of proletarian dictatorship, Marx and Engels based themselves on an analysis of the specific conditions that prevailed at the time. As Lenin put it, "Marx did not indulge in utopias; he expected the *experience* of the mass movement to provide the reply to the question as to the specific forms this organisation of the proletariat as the ruling class would assume. . . ."<sup>3</sup> The various forms of democratic republics prevailing during the lives of Marx and Engels were bourgeois in class content and were therefore beset by the evils common to bourgeois parliamentarism (the legislative being divorced from executive power, the members of parliament not being responsible to the electorate, etc.). Consequently, these forms were unacceptable to the proletariat and even inimical to it.

A democratic republic socialist in content was, in the opinion of Marx and Engels, the most appropriate form of proletarian state. While this was still but a hypothetical form of government, consistent proletarian democracy would be its most essential salient feature.

Political power in all preceding state types (slave-owning, feudal and capitalist) had invariably rested with a slight minority, the dominant exploiting classes. There could therefore be no talk of genuine democracy or real popular government. Only in a proletarian state could dominion not conflict with genuine popular government, could dictatorship itself be democratic, because there for the first time the exploited

class would become the ruling class and comprise the bulk of the population (or at least represent the interests of the overwhelming majority of people in that society).

Another key feature of the proletarian state would be the absence of a special military-bureaucratic apparatus divorced from the people and counterposed to them. Marx had concluded from the experience of the 1848-49 class struggles in Europe that all traces of the former military-bureaucratic state had to be rooted out during the proletarian revolution. In destroying the bourgeois state machine, the new leaders would have to remove the former civil servants from their posts, disband the old army, the courts of law, the office of state prosecutor, and radically reorganise them. This was, in Marx's view, an objective need, in that the former state apparatus could not serve the interests of the working people. As soon as the state became a proletarian instrument there would no longer be any reason for the working people to be isolated from the state apparatus. Moreover, state power would be measured by the strength of its ties with the people.

Finally, Marx and Engels maintained that the proletarian republic should be a single indivisible, centralised state. They argued that the proletariat was a consistent proponent of state centralism both from the standpoint of the labour movement's needs within capitalist society and state, and of its final goal being the building of communism. By way of exception, however, they envisaged federation as a possible means of solving the national question.

At that stage Marx and Engels had only outlined the future proletarian state in very general terms, since history had not yet offered them material for a more fundamental analysis.

They first formulated their general idea of a democratic republic as a socialist state on the basis of the Paris Commune of 1871. The Commune was the very first form of proletarian dictatorship after the workers had seized power by revolutionary means. The principal characteristics that positively distinguished this form of state from bourgeois parliamentary republics was the really representative nature of the new government bodies established on the basis of universal and equal suffrage, and the direct responsibility of the deputies to the electorate, thus ensuring that they could

be replaced. It was incumbent upon the new agencies to fulfil executive as well as legislative functions.<sup>4</sup>

It is important to realise, nonetheless, that being a dictatorship of the proletariat the Paris Commune did not share political control with anyone and was not yet a complete and solidly-based dictatorship. Significantly, no Marxist party directed the activity of the Commune as a political organisation of the insurrectionist workers. In fact, the lack of clear understanding of the proletariat's aims and tasks in class struggle caused the Paris Commune to make a number of political and economic blunders which were to undermine the Paris workers' dictatorship and ultimately bring their downfall.

Since the Paris Commune was shortlived (it lasted 72 days) it was unable to develop into a complete and fully mature proletarian dictatorship. But its experience enabled Marx and Engels to take their theory of the state form of proletarian dictatorship a step forward. They saw in the Commune the prototype of those specific, consistently democratic institutions which could successfully undertake the tasks of proletarian dictatorship. The state form of this dictatorship would have to be a republic along the lines of the Paris Commune where all institutions would be built afresh on the ruins of the former state apparatus.

The historic importance of the Paris Commune is in it being the first workers' attempt to establish a socialist state. It confirmed in practice that besides smashing the old oppressive state machine, the working class was capable of establishing a new state apparatus for running society.

LENIN'S THEORY OF  
A REPUBLIC OF SOVIETS.  
THE ESTABLISHMENT  
OF THE SOVIET  
SOCIALIST STATE

The Bolsheviks accepted the Marxist concept of the democratic republic as a "specific form" of proletarian dictatorship<sup>5</sup> when they were preparing for and carrying through the bourgeois-democratic revolution. Lenin had stressed that the bourgeois-democratic revolution would have to result in the establishment of a revolutionary-democratic dictatorship

by workers and peasants, and that the state form of this dictatorship would have to be a democratic republic.<sup>6</sup>

The first Russian Revolution of 1905, however, advanced a new form of proletarian organisation—the Soviets of Workers' Deputies. All the major principles of the Paris Commune found their expression in the Soviet form of state authority. It is deeply significant and surely not coincidental that the wide sections of working people produced revolutionary organisations with so much in common during two truly popular revolutions which took place at different times in different countries. It can scarcely be said that when the Alapayev factory workers in the Urals or the Ivanovo-Voznesensk workers formed the first Soviets, they had studied the experience of the Paris Commune. Yet they established organisations of the same type as the Commune, reflecting the national and historical circumstances that had brought them into being.

In the course of the bitter struggles of 1905, a great number and variety of revolutionary workers', peasants' and soldiers' organisations appeared. Yet from the very first, the Soviets stood out as organisations with most mass support. The Soviets of Workers' Deputies and the Soviets of Peasants' Deputies had grown respectively out of strike committees in the towns and revolutionary peasant committees in the countryside. From being strike-leading bodies the Soviets grew during the 1905 Revolution into agencies of proletarian armed insurrection. Whenever the insurrection was crowned with success, for however short a time, the Soviets became the new revolutionary authority. It is precisely this factor that explains the immense impact of the Soviets on the workers in 1905 even though they not infrequently arose spontaneously and with insufficient organisation.

Noting that the 1905 Soviets had transcended several stages and had not immediately become organs of armed insurrection and revolutionary authority, Lenin wrote in March 1906 that "...in the course of the struggle, these Soviets inevitably undergo a change both as regards their composition... and as regards the nature of their activities, by growing from purely strike organisations into organs of the general revolutionary struggle..."<sup>7</sup>

The first attempt to set up Soviets of Workers' Deputies in the spring of 1905 came from the Alapayev factory work-



ers in the Ural Mountains, which was at that time one of Russia's most industrial regions.<sup>8</sup> At the end of February 1905 the workers at the factory began to prepare for strike action on the instigation of the Bolsheviks; deputies were elected in the workshops to conduct negotiations with the management. The initial meeting of deputies occurred in early March to decide on strike action and draw up appropriate demands to be put to the management. Although the factory owner had the deputies arrested, he did not succeed in rendering the protest movement leaderless, for the workers announced the strike the very next day (March 7) and then, on March 8, elected new deputies, freed their arrested comrades and expelled the police and military commander.

At their conference on March 12, the deputies adopted a resolution to call their body the Assembly of Workers' Deputies. The strike went off in an organised way and under the leadership of the deputies, and the workers won the concessions they were after, namely, shorter hours, no pay reductions, higher overtime rates and some other demands. On conclusion of the strike the Assembly of Workers' Deputies persisted, unlike the strike committees which only operated for the duration of strikes. It conducted elections of shop committees which fixed the rates for completed work, set skill standards for workers, and controlled their employment and dismissal. At the insistence of the deputies, the factory management was obliged to sack some of its own personnel who had been especially brutal towards workers.

The Assembly of Workers' Deputies of the Alapayev factory had another very remarkable characteristic: it extended its influence to the peasants of the neighbouring countryside so that some peasant societies had their own delegated representatives on the committee and on April 18 a joint meeting of workers' and peasants' deputies took place. This was the embryo of one of the first Soviets of Workers' and Peasants' Deputies.

Another noteworthy Soviet was that at the Nadezhdin factory in Perm Gubernia. It was elected in late April 1905,<sup>9</sup> but the factory management had declared the elections null and void, since many of the Soviet's deputies were members of the Russian Social-Democratic Labour Party. The newly-

held elections produced the same results and the management then had no option but to recognise the deputies as intermediaries between labour and management. At their inaugural meeting the deputies named their body the Soviet of Workers' Representatives. At once the Soviet led the workers' fight for better economic conditions and a more secure legal status. A general meeting held in mid-May formulated the workers' demands to the management: 8-hour working day, higher wages, the formation of a workers' court under the auspices of the Soviet, etc. When the demands were not met, the Soviet called a strike. During the preparations for the strike the Soviet of Workers' Representatives changed its name to Soviet of Workers' Deputies. Although the strike ended three days later with complete victory for the workers, the Soviet persisted and extended its major activity, as the Alapayev Soviet had done. It set a limit to the working day and the factory wage rate. At its instigation the management sacked a doctor who had refused to certify that workers had been assaulted by the police. The Soviet's workers' court had drunkards and hooligans sacked from the factory. Further, the Soviet took control of the workers' co-operative which had previously been run largely by better-paid factory workers and office employees. It also took over the local police.

Both these examples amply show how Soviets that had started out as strike-directing bodies had gradually become mass political organisations and acted as the rudiments of a new revolutionary authority.

Lenin said of the 1905 Soviets that they "represented a dictatorship in embryo, for they recognised *no* other authority, *no* law and *no* standards, no matter by whom established...."

"What was this power based on, then? It was based on the mass of the people. This is the *main* feature that distinguished this new authority from all the preceding organs of the old regime."<sup>10</sup>

Further, in his analysis of the popular movement of 1905, Lenin emphasised that Soviets were set up "exclusively by the *revolutionary* sections of the people; they were formed irrespective of all laws and regulations, entirely in a revolutionary way, as a product of the native genius of the people, as a manifestation of the independent activity of the people

which has rid itself, or was ridding itself, of its old police fetters."<sup>11</sup> Moreover, Lenin stressed, the Soviets were not the invention of any political party, since there was no party which could have invented them.

Workers created and operated their Soviets on really democratic principles, with voting rights extended to all workmen, the act of voting being open or secret. Workers themselves determined the representation procedure and elected their deputies on a production basis, i.e., at the workplace.

It is worthy of note that in choosing their deputies, teams of workers from factories involved in the election would compile mandates as an intended programme of action for the Soviets and for which the deputies were fully accountable to their electors. One of the proclamations of the Moscow Soviet, for example, stated: "Deputies are bound constantly to account for all their actions and for which purpose they are to arrange general and local workers' meetings. Deputies are responsible to us, but we, too, are responsible for the deputies."<sup>12</sup>

The 1905-07 Soviets were already familiar with the practice of recalling deputies. From the very inception of Soviets, the urban and rural workers considered it their natural and inalienable right to recall their deputy at any time. The right to recall a deputy was also inscribed during the 1905 Russian Revolution in some Statutes of Soviets in such cities as Tver and Kostroma.

The Soviets set up their executives, sections and committees to deal with the principal areas of their work; for example, there were committees for tackling unemployment, delivering food, fodder and coal and for dealing with finance.<sup>13</sup>

The Soviets acted in the name of the workers as agents of a new authority. This is borne out by yet another compelling example—the Soviet of Workers' Deputies in the city of Novorossiisk.\* Once it had seized power the Soviet pro-

\* At that time the Soviets of Workers' Deputies were the main form of Soviets; other forms representing peasants, soldiers and other sections of the population were much rarer. It is important to remember that never in their history did the Soviets express the will of only one class. Even at their inception, when there still existed a distinction between Soviets of Workers' and Soviets of Peasants' Deputies, on the

claimed the "Novorossiisk Republic", established a revolutionary order in the city, replaced the old court by a new, revolutionary one, formed a people's militia, imposed taxes on the property-owners to aid the strikers, introduced a revolutionary censorship of the bourgeois press, began to publish its own news bulletins and carried out several other revolutionary acts.

Not everywhere, however, were the Soviets able to develop from strike-action bodies into organs of armed insurrection. A lot depended on the social composition of the 1905 Soviets, on whether they were led by Bolsheviks, Mensheviks or Socialist Revolutionaries.\* Wherever the petty-bourgeois parties were in control, the Soviets did not launch a resolute struggle against the autocracy.\*\* There lies one of the instructive lessons of the 1905 revolutionary struggle waged by the Soviets.

whole they expressed the will of the working people in general. What is important about the 1905 Soviets is that they were a rudimentary political form of the worker-peasant alliance. As history shows, the Soviets of Workers' Deputies tried to establish firm bonds with the poor peasants so as to act together against the common enemy—the detested tsarist and landowner system in Russia. On their side, the peasants in their Soviets of Peasants' Deputies, revolutionary peasant committees and other mass revolutionary organisations gave assistance to the workers' Soviets in their revolutionary struggle. This not only showed specifically in common actions in defending the railways and factories, but also in the provision of food to the striking urban workers.

\* The Mensheviks adhered to an opportunist line hostile to Marxism-Leninism and acted as agents of the bourgeoisie in the pre-revolutionary Russian labour movement. Menshevism as a petty-bourgeois opportunist group within the Russian Social-Democratic Labour Party arose at the Party's Second Congress in 1903. During the congress Lenin's followers gained a majority (*bolshinstvo* in Russian) in the vote for the Party's central bodies, while the opportunists who lost the vote became known henceforth as the "minority men" (*meshinstvo* is Russian for "minority"). The Mensheviks shrouded their subservience to the bourgeoisie and betrayal of the workers' interest in Marxist jargon, although they in fact revised, distorted and vulgarised Marxism as the theory of scientific communism. The Socialist Revolutionaries (otherwise known by their initials SRs) were a petty-bourgeois Russian party founded in 1902. By class make-up they were the party of the rural and urban petty bourgeoisie and gained most of their support from the kulaks.

\*\* During the 1905 revolution, there arose 62 Soviets of Workers', Soldiers' and Peasants' Deputies, 47 of which were led by Bolsheviks or were under their influence, 10 were Menshevik, and 1 Socialist Revolutionary. See *Voprosy istorii KPSS*, No. 1, M., 1965, pp. 70-71.



The historic importance of the 1905 Soviets is primarily in their organisation and activity; they showed they were extremely popular among the workers, quite capable of being not merely organs of revolutionary struggle for toppling the old order, but organs of a new state government.

Although defeat of the first Russian revolution led to the disbanding of the Soviets, their very concept lived on in people's minds. Lenin used their experience for his further elaboration of the theory of the Soviets as a state form of proletarian dictatorship. Although they were important they could not yet act as a new form of proletarian dictatorship for the state as a whole. It was only after the February revolution of 1917, in fact, that Lenin advocated the Soviets as a form of socialist statehood. In April 1917 he put forward his idea on the formation of a republic of Soviets, being guided by the revolutionary experience of the 1905 and 1917 Soviets and the specific nature of the development of the bourgeois-democratic to socialist revolution. He regarded the Soviets as the most suitable form of proletarian state for Russia.

One of the most striking aspects of the February 1917 bourgeois-democratic revolution was the awakening of popular initiative for building Soviets. In just a few days Soviets of Workers', Peasants' and Soldiers' Deputies sprang up as revolutionary bodies all over the country. The Communist Party guided the turbulent process of mass revolutionary initiative and, as Lenin suggested, gave top priority to the organisation of Soviets of Workers' Deputies and to Poor Peasants' Soviets under workers' leadership. He saw this as a necessary step in moving from the first stage of the revolution to the second, as the start of the dismantling of the bourgeois state machine and the establishment of a proletarian state.

Both the Mensheviks and the Socialist Revolutionaries, on the other hand, sought after February to make the Soviets mere appendages of the bourgeois Provisional Government and did their best to prevent them becoming effective governing bodies. They used every means to discredit the idea of Soviet government and debase the mass workers' organisations so as to deprive the working class of their major organisational weapon in the fight for proletarian dictatorship. They overtly labelled the Soviets provisional bodies that

were to be dissolved and replaced by permanent bourgeois-republican institutions. In the words of Lieber, a prominent Menshevik, "the Soviets are so far an untutored form of government, they are an *ad hoc* workers' organisation valid only until the Constituent Assembly meets. It is not yet certain what will become of them. The Soviets are not organisations of the people as a whole". This was a view supported by Chernov, leader of the Socialist Revolutionaries: "Being a random organisation, the Soviets must not become a government in defiance of democracy. Such a government would not last two days."<sup>14</sup>

Meanwhile the Bolsheviks used the Soviets to teach workmen the ways of wielding state authority in practice and extended the scope of Soviet activity to tackle political and economic tasks for the nation as a whole. They vigorously helped to dispel the centuries-old myth about the privileged, exploiting classes being the only capable government.

The dominant position of the Communist Party within the Soviets was a natural development of the situation.<sup>15</sup> Mass organisations developed in Russia around the Party, growing together with it and under its guidance. It was due to Lenin's keen appreciation of the essence and role of the Soviets as government agencies and the most massive workers' organisations that a proper relationship evolved between the Soviets and the Communist Party. It was his foresight and leadership that ensured victory in the fight against the opportunists who attempted to drive a wedge between the Party and the Soviets, counterpose one to the other, and isolate the latter from Party influence.

Initially, the Communists had a minority in the Soviets but they gradually earned popular respect for their selfless fight for workers' interests and gained nomination to leading posts in the Soviets. In every Soviet the Communists set up their Party groups or factions in which they initially debated in advance all the principal issues of Soviet work and drew up their proposals. These proposals subsequently had often to be defended in keen polemic with the overt and covert enemies of socialism before a majority in the Soviet could be convinced of their veracity.\*

\* For details of Communist Party leadership of the Soviets see pp. 69 et seq.

On the eve of the October 1917 Revolution the Black Hundred newspaper *Novoye Uremya* (*New Times*) poured scorn on the idea of Bolsheviks holding power: "Let us suppose for one moment that the Bolsheviks won. Who would govern us then? It could be the cooks, those connoisseurs of cutlets and steaks? Or the firemen? Grooms or boilermen? Or perhaps the nannies would dash to the State Council in between washing babies' nappies? Who then? Who would these statesmen be? Fitters would perhaps be in charge of the theatre, plumbers diplomacy, carpenters the post office and telegraph? Would this happen? No. Is it feasible? History will provide the Bolsheviks with a resounding answer to that ridiculous question."<sup>16</sup>

History's answer was quite unambiguous: it proved that the Bolsheviks were utterly correct in putting their faith in the inexhaustible creative powers of the people; the workers and peasants showed that once in power they could do more than just run the state, they could do it infinitely better than the bourgeoisie and landowners had ever done.

The events of the following few months exposed and demolished all the opponents of the Soviets; the further course of the revolution eloquently testified that the Soviets, and only the Soviets, could become a revolutionary government and a basis for a completely new type of state.

The Russian proletarian revolution was an integral part of the world revolutionary process, being the first tangible product of the age-old popular liberation struggle. By putting the workers in power it became the initial paramount act of the world revolution. The Russian socialist revolution, which had been presaged by the entire course of social history and by an acute exacerbation of deep-going social conflicts, confirmed the Marxist-Leninist theory of the need to smash the bourgeois state machine. That it rested on the Soviets, a powerful political organisation of the underprivileged, greatly predetermined the revolution's success. Once they had overthrown the monarchy and swiftly organised themselves, the workers put the 1905-07 experience to good effect by forming their new revolutionary organisation and uniting through the Soviets the strong political army of their allies for making an assault on bourgeois power. The Soviets embodied the alliance of workers and non-proletarian sections of the exploited and were the most accessible

and therefore the most comprehensive form of workers' organisation.<sup>17</sup>

On October 25 (November 7), 1917, the Second All-Russia Congress of Soviets proclaimed the transfer of the entire state authority to the Soviets. It nominated the All-Russia Central Executive Committee (*UTsIK*) as the highest agency of state power for the period between Soviet congresses. It also adopted a resolution on the formation of a worker-peasant government in the form of the Council of People's Commissars, with Lenin as Chairman.

The Declaration to All Soviets, Workers, Soldiers and Peasants, adopted at a *UTsIK* meeting on November 9, 1917, dissolved the institute of Commissioners of the Provisional Government that had been appointed in March and April to replace the former tsarist governors. By November, Soviet government prevailed in more than half the major cities of European Russia. The Declaration of the People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs "To All Soviets of Workers', Soldiers', Peasants' and Farm Labourers' Deputies" (December 1917) stated that regional, provincial and *uyezd* Soviets "must immediately and in the most vigorous way see that Soviets function in all corners of their territory coordinating them through the agency of the regional, provincial and *uyezd* Soviets."<sup>18</sup>

The normal procedure was for Soviet authority to take hold in provincial centres and then quickly spread to *uyezd* towns. In the early months of the socialist revolution complete authority was in the hands of the town Soviets in provincial and *uyezd* centres. Those Soviets were, therefore, governing bodies not merely in the given town, but also throughout the area of the respective *uyezd* or province. They played a large part in forming and strengthening new governing bodies in the localities because they were predominantly more proletarian in their social composition than the provincial and *uyezd* congresses of Soviets. Not infrequently the Soviets of the *uyezd* centres merged with the *uyezd* Soviet congresses to form a single governing body for town and *uyezd*.<sup>19</sup>

From about April and May of 1918, *volost* and *uyezd* congresses, which elected delegates to the province congresses, were normally convened before the provincial congresses of Soviets. Literally, in the very first days of the revolution



Soviets took over almost everywhere in the localities the provincial and *uyezd* Provisional Government commissioners with their governmental agencies (the militia and judiciary).

Ever since November 1917 and particularly in the January-May period of the following year, the local Soviets, especially the provincial ones, had at their congresses and conferences formulated and adopted regulations and statutes which outlined the system of government in the provinces, *uyezds*, *volosts* and villages. The creation of this system commenced with the formation of Soviet executive committees by the Soviets and Soviet congresses. Thus, the Moscow Provincial Executive Committee drew up a plan for its system of administration which it ratified on February 14, 1918. It provided for the setting up of the Executive Committee Presidium, various departments and other bodies with general and specific powers; it also defined the democratic forms of their organisation and activity.<sup>20</sup>

The executive committees at that time had a number of drawbacks: they greatly lacked uniformity and common standards of representation in their formation. Nonetheless, local Soviets at all levels elected their executive bodies, as a rule, with strict representation from the lower Soviets or their executive committees and from popular associations and organisations. This procedure was established in order to attract as wide a body of working people as possible into the work of the governing agencies, and to cement relations between these agencies and the various mass organisations.

The executive committee departments did not come into existence immediately. The most important of them appeared at the same time as the executive committees, the remainder somewhat later as the Soviets wrested control of all economic functions in the localities.

Lenin spoke of the Soviets at the Seventh Party Congress in March 1918: "There is much that is crude and unfinished in our Soviets, there is no doubt about that, it is obvious to everyone who examines their work; but what is important, has historical value and is a step forward in the world development of socialism, is that they are a new type of state."<sup>21</sup>

In its intense campaign to combat both active and passive sabotage, the Soviet government had demolished the old bourgeois-landowner apparatus of oppression. That did not

mean mere dissolution. In fact, the victorious workers took from the old governmental bodies all the information they needed to initiate their work, the personnel, the specialists and the enforceable enactments that did not conflict with the interests of proletarian dictatorship. How much could be used depended on the extent of sabotage, and this had to be borne in mind when dismantling the old judiciary, the *zemstvo* councils, city *dumas*, the armed forces and factory management.<sup>22</sup>

Lenin taught the victorious workers to be extremely circumspect in dealing with that complex issue, to be flexible in their evaluation of the role and importance of the constituent parts of the state apparatus, and to be mindful of their future. As for the reactionary, repressive parts of the bourgeois state, such as the standing army, the police and the civil servants, they were to be unquestionably disbanded, inasmuch as the old organisational principles, and the ways and means of work of these bodies were totally unacceptable to the workers. But that was not an appropriate way of dealing with parts of the old apparatus responsible for purely economic administration or the type of auditing and statistical work that any advanced society needs—such institutions as banks, state syndicates, the post office and telegraph and municipal bodies. In Lenin's words, "This apparatus must not, and should not, be smashed. It must be wrested from the control of the capitalists; the capitalists and the wires they pull must be *cut off, lopped off, chopped away from* this apparatus; it must be *subordinated* to the proletarian Soviets; it must be expanded, made more comprehensive, and nation-wide."<sup>23</sup>

Working on this precept, the workers, peasants and servicemen of liberated Russia were able quite rapidly to establish their state apparatus and make it work normally and uninterruptedly. Under Communist Party guidance they created new economic and cultural agencies, a new popular judiciary, and the new worker-peasant Red Army mobilised for the country's defence. The mass workers' organisations were the chief source on which the Soviet state was to draw for its new administrative personnel.

In the course of building the Soviet state, the working people produced talented organisers and leaders, tempered and enriched by their revolutionary experience. This process

occurred at all levels of the Soviets, the workers' control agencies and the armed forces. These personnel, from the most humble origins and representing all manner of working people, played a huge and decisive part in establishing and fortifying the worker-peasant state.

It was the revolutionary popular initiative that inspired a better organisational structure of the Soviets and a new unified system of government on the principle of democratic centralism, despite the irreconcilable class struggle that the country was going through. Lenin had made quite clear that before socialism could be established the working class would have to work out "forms which will enable all working people to adapt themselves easily to the work of governing the state and establishing law and order".<sup>24</sup> That was the course the Soviets followed, drawing themselves as close as possible to the working people. By the spring of 1918 there existed throughout the country a unified system of representative bodies which operated under the leadership of the working class spearheaded by the Communist Party. It was, in effect, the organisational embodiment of the worker-peasant alliance. From January 1918 the Soviets took the name of Soviets of Workers', Peasants' and Red Army-men's Deputies.

The first Soviet Constitution of 1918 gave legislative recognition to the revolution-inspired Soviet system and confirmed that power nationally and in all localities resided wholly and exclusively in the working people and their authorised bodies of representatives—the Soviets of Workers', Soldiers' and Peasants' Deputies. "The substance of Soviet government," Lenin pointed out, "is that the permanent and only foundation of state power, the entire machinery of state, is the mass-scale organisation of the classes oppressed by capitalism. . . . It is the people, who even in the most democratic bourgeois republics, while possessing equal rights by law, have in fact been debarred by thousands of devices and subterfuges from participation in political life and enjoyment of democratic rights and liberties, that are now drawn into constant and unfailing, moreover, decisive, participation in the democratic administration of the state."<sup>25</sup>

These words underline the genuine democratism of the Soviets, their principal distinguishing feature as the most expedient form of government in the world's first socialist state.

M. I. Kalinin, one of the Soviet outstanding statesmen, asked in 1920: "What exactly are *the advantages of the Soviets* that make the workers and peasants cling to them? The chief advantage is that they are able to *draw wide sections of working people into their ranks*. It is only thanks to this that the Russian working class has been able to retain power. Only this attribute has made it possible for so many people to keep in close contact with governing bodies. . . . Only these forms of government provide the opportunity for *proper control over the people in power*. No parliament in Europe has this."<sup>26</sup>

Events have confirmed the expediency of the organisational forms of the Soviets inspired by popular revolutionary initiative and based on the specific circumstances of Russia's transition from capitalism to socialism. By excluding the exploiters, for example, from government agencies and by disfranchising them, the Soviets were able to suppress the fierce resistance of the new regime's bitterest enemies. The working people's direct election of deputies to rural and urban Soviets was an expression of the Soviets' true democracy, while the congressional system and indirect elections to higher bodies were intended at the time to provide the maximum possible contact between the people and state agencies at all levels. Another feature peculiar to the prevailing circumstances was the weighted representation of the proletariat (compared with the peasantry) in elections to the Soviets so as to guarantee the workers' leading role in society. By the then existing procedure of congresses, lower Soviets sent their best members to higher Soviets. Since they had an advantage in election to the Soviets, the workers were thereby able to employ their most able members for strengthening those bodies of Soviets that dealt with the most serious issues. This met the interests of all working people.

#### SOVIETS AND THE BUILDING OF SOCIALIST SOCIETY

The Decree on Peace was the very first decree which the young Soviet state addressed to the governments and peoples of all nations. Given the prevailing circumstances of a



barbarous war in which thousands of human lives perished by the hour, the world's first worker-peasant state appealed to all peoples in the war and to their governments to begin immediate negotiations for a just and democratic peace. By that the Soviet Government advocated, in its Peace Decree indited by Lenin, an immediate peace treaty without annexations or indemnities. The Decree condemned the imperialist policy of enslaving nations and pointed out that since the war concerned the division of the weaker nations among the strong and wealthy nations, the Soviet Government regarded it as a heinous crime against humanity. Elsewhere the Decree proclaimed the Soviet government's determination at once to underwrite peace terms that would stop the war on a just basis for all nations; if these were unacceptable, the government was ready to consider any other peace terms. Further, the Decree revoked the practice of secret diplomacy and announced the government's firm intention of conducting all negotiations openly in full view of the whole nation.

The ratification of Lenin's Decree on Peace was consistent with the salient aspects of Soviet foreign policy whose basis is the principles of peace, equal rights, national self-determination, respect for the independence and sovereignty of all countries, and straightforward humanitarian methods of socialist diplomacy. Somewhat later, in 1919, the Congress of Soviets ratified the Lenin-composed resolution that proclaimed: "The Russian Socialist Federative Soviet Republic wishes to live in peace with all peoples and devote all its efforts to internal development. . . ." <sup>27</sup>

On Lenin's initiative, the Soviet Government solemnly declared its "complete break with the barbarous policy of bourgeois civilisation, which has built the prosperity of the exploiters belonging to a few chosen nations on the enslavement of hundreds of millions of working people in Asia, in the colonies in general, and in the small countries". <sup>28</sup>

Once a peace treaty had been concluded and a breathing space gained, the Soviet republic got down to the job of building socialism. At that time socialist nationalisation of industry was top priority among economic changes and was to become the first economic task of the Soviets. Following Lenin's maxim that what mattered was not the mere passing

of decrees or even the very fact of nationalisation but the actual control of production, the *UTsIK* approved on November 14, 1917, the "Statute on Workers' Control". This document granted the workers' control agencies all rights in controlling the production, supply, marketing and finance of industrial enterprises. They were afforded the status of state bodies responsible for economic planning in the factories for all branches of industry. Their decisions were binding on the factory owners.

Special commissions, or factory committees, came into being directly to implement workers' control in the factories. The work of the factory control agencies was supervised by *uyezd*, town, *gubernia* and regional councils of workers' control, whose members were from Soviets of Workers' Deputies, trade unions and factory committees.

Significantly, the workers' control agencies had two parent authorities: the workers' control council immediately above it and the respective Soviet of Workers' Deputies.

Naturally enough, the *ci-devant* exploiting classes came into a headlong clash with workers' control and did all they could to evade it. Capitalists sabotaged the measures taken by workers' control agencies, closed down their factories, sacked their employees, sold their factories and mills to foreign buyers and smuggled their capital out of the country. With the backing of the Soviet government, however, the workers managed to overcome the problems of sabotage and got down to the business of organising production. By the end of 1917 and in 1918 the workers' control agencies had done a great deal in getting production flowing at factories that had been shut down, and in providing industry with fuel, raw materials, equipment and orders.

In spite of the great importance of the work undertaken, that was only the first step in nationalisation. Precisely how important it was, Lenin himself made clear when he stated that "the workers themselves might tackle the momentous tasks of building up industry in a vast country without and opposed to exploiters". <sup>29</sup>

The next step taken by the Soviets in nationalising industry was the setting up of the Supreme Economic Council and local economic councils on December 2, 1917. The Soviets played a substantial part in setting up the economic

councils (*sovmarkhozy*), which they regarded as the economic agents of proletarian dictatorship.\* It was explicitly stated, for example, in the instructions on the economic councils, that Supreme Economic Council and the local economic councils were the economic agencies of the Soviets and bore responsibility for all their activity to *VTsIK*, the government and the local Soviet executives.

One of the main tasks of the economic councils was to carry through the programme of nationalisation. State and private banks and all forms of transport were nationalised, a monopoly of foreign trade was introduced and foreign loans were annulled; these measures were a vital prelude to the nationalisation of large-scale industry, envisaged in Lenin's programme.

In actual fact the socialist sector of industry had grown up in the early days of the revolution when the Soviets had taken over the factories and institutions belonging to the bourgeois state. The Soviet Government had intended to nationalise private industry gradually, starting with the biggest and most economically vital factories and branches of industry. But the resistance put up by the capitalists forced the government's hand and it was obliged to speed up the process. As Lenin said at the time, even the great pundits of capitalist society, their brightest minds, could not indicate specific forms of economic transformation or development rates of specific reorganisation. All this had to be learned by experience.<sup>30</sup>

As a rule, local Soviets were cautious in their approach to nationalisation and first formed *ad hoc* committees to investigate the situation at the factory concerned. Only then was the final decision taken. They also took into account the national importance of the factory or the branch of industry.<sup>31</sup>

On June 28, 1918, the Council of People's Commissars issued a decree on the nationalisation of all large-scale industry in the country, a decree that established the economic foundation of the young Soviet republic. It met extensive

\* Of the 44 economic councils in the Moscow region, for example, 14 were set up on Soviet congress resolutions, 22 on the orders of provincial and *uyezd* executive committees of Soviets of Workers', Soldiers' and Peasants' Deputies. See V. Z. Drobizhev and A. B. Medvedev, *Iz istorii sovmarkhozov, 1917-18* (From a History of the Economic Councils, 1917-18), M., 1964, p. 70.

support among the workers who then set about putting it into practice. As a result, more than three thousand industrial concerns were taken over by late August 1918.<sup>32</sup> This was the time when the Soviets and their agencies, the economic councils, began to plan production, labour organisation, management, material and technical supplies, marketing, recruitment and training of personnel and several other matters.

Thus it was that in the very first year of the country's existence the government, with the steadfast support and participation of the workers, had to deal with state administration of large-scale industry and switch from workers' control to workers' management of factories and railways. Much of the credit for the success of this was due to the Soviets, whose economic decrees were the initial plans for economic construction.

Lenin had frequently pointed out that the question of worker-peasant alliance was the most fundamental one of the socialist revolution. Lenin's party, in fact, had been the only party consistently to stand by the demand to destroy the landowning system of agriculture and transfer the land to peasant democratic institutions. That is why the Soviet Government had passed its Decree on Land on its very first day of office. The Decree abolished private ownership of land (which meant in effect its nationalisation) and its wealth and instituted an egalitarian labour system of land tenure (which accorded with peasant demands). It mirrored as many as 242 peasant mandates which had been sent in to the First All-Russia Congress of Peasants' Deputies in the form of a Peasant Land Mandate.

Lenin's position on the issue of equal land tenure is particularly noteworthy; he regarded it as "the idealisation of capitalism by the small producer",<sup>33</sup> yet having a certain progressive character in the battle against the landowners and in carrying through the bourgeois-democratic revolution to its conclusion.<sup>34</sup> Since the bulk of the peasants believed at that time in equal land tenure, seeing it as a salvation from dire need and economic inequality, the Communist Party made a concession to the peasants and tried to overcome this petty-bourgeois prejudice by practical experience, gradually bringing the peasants round to socialist slogans.



At the same time, Lenin noted in the Peasant Land Mandate several demands of a socialist nature; it contained a demand, for example, for the most productive landowners' farms to be left intact and turned into model state farms, and a demand for all farm implements and machinery on confiscated land to be turned over for the exclusive use of the state or the local community.

Nationalisation did more than destroy the landowners' system of land tenure; it dealt a crushing blow to the whole system of private ownership of land in that some 21 million hectares of land belonging to merchants and factory owners and a further 70 million hectares of private holdings mortgaged in banks were added to the nationalised landowners' land.<sup>35</sup>

By transferring all landowners' land, imperial, church and monastery estates to the working people without compensation, the Second Congress of Soviets thereby satisfied the economic needs of the majority, won the working class even firmer support from the poor peasants and, at the same time, neutralised the middle peasants. The Decree on Land met the age-old aspirations of the peasants and demonstrated in the most vivid and convincing way who were their real friends and guardians. During the few months, between March and October 1917, that the Socialist Revolutionaries had been in power, they had done absolutely nothing to implement their agrarian programme. The Bolsheviks, on the other hand, had on the very first day of the socialist revolution met the peasant demands and thereby won peasant support away from the Socialist Revolutionaries. "That is exactly how the Russian proletariat *won the peasantry* from the Socialist Revolutionaries, and won them literally *a few hours* after achieving state power."<sup>36</sup>

The *uyezd* Soviets of Peasants' Deputies were primarily entrusted with implementing the Decree because the provincial Soviets contained few poor peasants and the *volost* and village Soviets were still in the formative stage. So it was that they received all confiscated land and equipment, had a mandate to take all measures they deemed necessary to see that confiscation was carried out strictly according to government orders, to draw up accurate inventories of property and safeguard it from thieves. Inasmuch as the Decree did not spell out all the details of its implementation, the peas-

ants themselves and the land committees and Soviets were empowered to use their own discretion and knowledge of local conditions in tackling the task properly.

Until the spring of 1918 the Soviets had, in the main, been extremely busy in confiscating landowners' estates, parcelling them out among the peasants, urgently training land surveyors, carrying out the spring sowing, improving crops as a major means of improving yields, and proffering aid to the pioneer collective farms.

The adoption of the Land Decree by the Soviets' Congress and the work of the Soviets in putting it into effect strikingly demonstrated the democratic nature of the Soviet system.

In a relatively short time, then, the government had nationalised large-scale industry, the banks, railways and the land; it had established a monopoly over foreign trade. All natural resources and the key means of production were now in the hands of the people: the workers became masters of the factories and mines, the peasants had the land. In all the commanding heights of the economy public ownership of the means of production was now a *fait accompli* and formed the economic foundation of socialism.

The Soviet government proclaimed equal rights for all nations and ensured them the right to self-determination. It abrogated all estate divisions and social estate privileges and granted women equal rights with men.

As a form of proletarian dictatorship the Soviets certainly proved their viability during the Revolution and Civil War and, by their close unbreakable ties with all sections of the working people, they demonstrated their superiority as a form of government. They did much to mobilise the popular effort in rebuffing the whiteguard army and the armies of intervention. Inevitably, war left its mark on the Soviets. Military conflict engulfed key regions of the young worker-peasant state and left a considerable part of the country temporarily in enemy hands. When these areas were liberated they lay devastated and desolate; insufficient personnel meant that Soviet organs had to be formed anew.

To meet the defensive needs of the country *UTsIK* established the Council of Workers' and Peasants' Defence, an extraordinary body headed by Lenin, on November 30, 1918. The Defence Council was empowered to mobilise all

the resources and manpower it needed to defend the republic. Its decisions were consequently binding on all central and local departments and institutions, and on all citizens. Further, because of the war, interim extraordinary ruling bodies, revolutionary committees, came into being in some provinces, *uyezds*, towns and *volosts*; their powers were defined in the Statute on Revolutionary Committees issued by *VTsIK* and the Defence Council. Normally, the revolutionary committees appeared in the frontline area where the counter-revolutionaries caused most trouble, but as the government re-established control, they gradually faded out.

War also had its effect on the methods employed by the Soviets: it simply was not feasible to apply consistently the principle of collective decision-making. Similarly, the elective principle sometimes went by the board in favour of a single authority and military methods. Immediately after the hostilities, however, and as soon as the country had returned to peaceful construction, the democratic principles of election, collective decision-making and extensive popular participation in the Soviets' work were all re-established.

The Communist Party and the government took great care that life returned to normal and the Soviets reappeared as swiftly as possible in the newly-liberated zones. Illustrative of this is the following curt note from Lenin to D. I. Kursky, People's Commissar of Justice, on July 1920:

Have measures been taken for the *immediate* (1) setting up of *Soviet power* in the liberated areas; (2) holding of *congresses* of Soviets; (3) expulsion of the *landowners*, distribution of *part* of their lands among *Soviets* of agricultural labourers?"<sup>37</sup>

Despite the upheaval of the war, the *volost*, *uyezd*, provincial and all-Russia congresses of Soviets met regularly to debate and tackle the most pressing problems of defence and of economic and social life.

By that time the Communist Party enjoyed the huge confidence of the working people and, consequently, Communists and their supporters kept majorities at the Soviet congresses. From the second half of 1918 to October 1919, for instance, when the Soviet Republic was repulsing two joint thrusts from the Entente forces, Communists gained virtually four-fifths of all mandates at Soviet congresses. The other political parties steadily lost ground among the people and vanished from political life. Between October 1917

and July 1918, for example, the Left Socialist Revolutionaries constituted 21 per cent of all delegates to Soviet congresses, yet between the latter part of 1918 and January 1919 their percentage dropped to 3. By their counter-revolutionary activity they had utterly compromised themselves in the eyes of the people.<sup>38</sup>

The First Congress of Chairmen of Provincial Soviets took place in Moscow on July 30, 1918. It took stock of the work of the local Soviets and outlined ways of improving their work during the Civil War and foreign intervention. In a speech to the congress, Lenin said that the Soviet administration was successfully getting on with its job in spite of the stresses and strains of the war and staff deficiencies. He was particularly concerned about the work of the local governmental bodies, stressing that the government had no intention of belittling the importance of the local authorities or killing their autonomy and initiative.<sup>39</sup>

The turmoil of Civil War and military intervention forced the Communist Party and the government to switch to the policy that has become known as War Communism. One of the central planks in this policy was the full-scale nationalisation of industry and its handing over to the Soviets. Another was the food surplus requisitioning which took the form of state forcible commandeering of grain and other produce. This was a provisional measure forced on the government by the desperate circumstances of War Communism. Another coercive measure was the introduction of universal labour service for all citizens, even members of the deposed exploiter classes. The labour service policy, for which the Soviets were in effect responsible, made it possible to provide fuel, undertake certain types of farm work in the state farms, build and repair roads, clear away the snow in cities, and repair factories, hospitals and schools.

During the Civil War, the Soviets had to deal with substantial issues in the social field as well. By drawing the workers into administration and economic work the Soviets now had the daunting problem on their hands of raising their educational level and training new specialists. They made available to the workers libraries, schools, a variety of educational courses, cultural institutions, clubs, reading rooms and theatres. In fact, they did everything in their power, given the prevailing conditions, to provide workers



and peasants with knowledge and the opportunity to improve their qualifications and cultural standards.

The Soviets endeavoured to give workers' children priority entrance to secondary schools and colleges so as to lay the basis for creating the new, Soviet specialists.

From their very inception the Soviets were widely representative and workers and peasants were able, immediately after the Revolution, to get used to running state affairs. Nevertheless, by virtue of the political and socio-economic conditions, all workers could not effectively take advantage of the unlimited opportunities for taking part in government which the Soviet system granted them. Lenin had foreseen this before the Revolution when he had stated quite categorically: "We are not utopians. We know that an unskilled labourer or a cook cannot immediately get on with the job of state administration."<sup>40</sup> One reason for this was the lack of education, the absence of elementary literacy. It is indicative that nearly 30 per cent of deputies to rural Soviets in the first few years were either illiterate or barely literate, and 68 per cent had had only very elementary schooling.<sup>41</sup>

As Lenin put it, "apart from the law, there is still the level of culture, which you cannot subject to any law. The result of this low cultural level is that the Soviets, which by virtue of their programme are organs of government by *the working people*, are in fact organs of government for *the working people* by the advanced section of the proletariat. . . . Here we are confronted by a problem which cannot be solved except by prolonged education."<sup>42</sup>

The Seventh All-Russia Congress of Soviets in December 1919 secured by legislation the principle of drawing every Soviet deputy into definite government work, but it was impossible to put the principle into practice at that time. It could only happen over the years of socialist construction in step with economic development and higher all-round cultural standards.

In February and April 1920 the All-Russia Central Executive Committee drew up two statutes: On Rural Soviets and On *Volost* Executive Committees, both of which were of prime importance, since their issuing marked the conclusion of a major stage of organisation of local Soviet authorities. They established voting procedure to the rural Soviets and the *volost* Executive Committees, delimited the func-

tions of the local Soviets and their competence, and thereby helped to strengthen Soviet government bodies and afforded them greater economic initiative.

Thanks to the heroism and selfless labour of workers and peasants, and the truly titanic efforts made to salvage the gains of the Revolution, both internal and external counter-revolution was defeated and the Soviet state was able to open a new chapter in its history by building socialism.

Immediately on the conclusion of Civil War, the Soviets supervised the work of rehabilitating industry and agriculture. But the new period brought with it new economic and cultural issues, issues that were novel, complex, multifarious and demanding utmost effort. In fact, in the new complex situation, the Soviets had to tackle all outstanding issues affecting the workers' lives. They ran industry and agriculture, were responsible for the national exchequer, land tenure, education, health, food provisions and municipal services.

In the years 1921-23, several regions of the country were hit by an unprecedented drought and the local Soviets had to direct virtually all their attention to saving millions of peasants from starvation; in other regions the Soviets had to collect money and provisions to help the starving, to find homes and work for fugitives from the drought-hit Volga regions and to found orphanages for the children who had lost their parents in the famine.

The change-over to the New Economic Policy (NEP) presented the Soviets with new problems in their battle with private capital and necessitated supervision over private enterprise in industry and trade and curbs on the exploiting instincts of kulaks in the countryside. The new situation required new methods and the Soviets acquired new economic and cultural rights. In 1922, *VTsIK* drew up and ratified new statutes on the rural Soviets and on the *uyezd*, *volost* and *gubernia* Soviet bodies defining their functions and competence on the basis of the general experience they had so far accumulated.

It was becoming necessary to galvanise the work of the Soviets, since hostile elements were stepping up their activity; both the urban and rural bourgeoisie, by dint of their improved economic status, were now trying to utilise the Soviets in their own interests. While in the early NEP years the Soviets had failed to reorganise their work radically, by

the mid-1920s the stage was set for the Soviets at all levels to take the initiative, since industry and agriculture were back on their feet, the workers' standard of living had improved and the political activity of both workers and peasants was increasing. The policy of stimulating the work of the Soviets, starting from 1924, cemented the alliance between workers and peasants and helped to draw the Soviet state apparatus closer to its popular grass roots. The Third Congress of Soviets of the USSR held in 1925 adopted a special resolution on the question of spreading the mass work of the Soviets and bolstering the local Soviets.

Formation of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics was an event of great importance in the history of the Soviets. The working people of Russia, the Ukraine, Byelorussia and the Transcaucasia well appreciated that the isolated position of individual Soviet republics made for instability and harboured the threat to their existence from the capitalist states. The interests of national defence and of restoring the war-ravaged economy insistently demanded united efforts from the individual Soviet republics. The treaty relations linking them all had become patently insufficient by that time.

That is why in late 1922 the Tenth All-Russia Congress of Soviets, the Seventh All-Ukraine Congress of Soviets, the Fourth All-Byelorussia Congress of Soviets and the First Transcaucasia Congress of Soviets all debated the issue of unification in the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. The issue was tabled on December 30, 1922, for the attention of the First Congress of Soviets of the USSR which ratified the declaration and treaty on the establishment of the USSR and informed the world of the birth of a new, union multinational state.

In accordance with the congress decision, *UTsIK*, in January 1923, set up a commission to draw up a union Constitution. And in the summer of that year the draft Constitution was ready; on July 6 it was approved at a session of *UTsIK* of the USSR and made law. It was formally ratified by the Second All-Union Congress of Soviets on January 31, 1924.

The 1924 Soviet Constitution consolidated the unification of four republics—the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic, the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic, the

Byelorussian Soviet Socialist Republic and the Transcaucasian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic—into a single union. The Constitution tersely defined the competence of the Union and its constituent republics, so that the supreme government bodies of the Union were made responsible for international relations, supervision of the armed forces, overall administration of the economy and its most important branches (Article 1). Each constituent republic, as stated in Article 3, was to be responsible for its state administration independently and retain the right to secede from the Union; further, no territorial changes involving a constituent republic were to be permitted without its agreement.

The Constitution described the structure and competence of the higher bodies of state authority of the Union, the agencies of state power and administration of the constituent republics and the relations between them. The work of improving the apparatus of the Soviets was to continue within each republic and they shortly drew up new provisions for town Soviets. Town and village Soviets now created their own mass organisations—sections which were in effect subordinate to the Soviets, assisting them in their work and supervising factories and offices. The sections included both Soviet deputies and active workers who enjoyed the same rights as the deputies. The group of active members constantly grew, the work of the deputies improved and their contacts with the electors strengthened.

In the early years of peaceful construction, therefore, the Soviets did considerable work in restoring the economy and creating the prerequisites for its socialist reconstruction, in reinstating the democratic principles of the work of the Soviets and in stimulating their activity.

Socialist society could not be built, as Lenin would reiterate, without advanced heavy industry. The next task, therefore, was industrialisation. Both the Fourteenth Party Conference and the Fourteenth Party Congress brought to the fore the question of the industrialisation of the country to which all national resources and manpower were to be devoted. The Soviets were to play their part in carrying through the industrialisation programme; they were to explain to the workers the necessity for tackling this most momentous task in a relatively short time and in effectively putting the programme into action.



A decision On Strengthening the Town Soviets was adopted in April 1925, to be followed at the end of the year by a Statute on the Fundamental Principles of the Work and Organisation of Town Soviets. Both these acts substantially enhanced the powers of the town Soviets and made them responsible for all aspects of the municipal economy. Industrial development and urban services were their central concerns at that time. One more extremely important act should be mentioned: the *UTsIK* decree of August 2, 1926 On Municipal Enterprises and Buildings Under the Jurisdiction of Municipal (Local) Departments of Local Executive Committees (of Town Soviets), by which the town Soviets were accorded the right to control the activity of the enterprises of republican and Union importance.<sup>43</sup>

During the industrialisation campaign the work of local Soviets took on even greater significance, since it now rested on the growing political and economic activity of the workers; the Soviets gained wider powers, the district, town and village Soviets gradually taking over many functions that had previously belonged to territorial, regional and area Executive Committees. A new administrative-territorial reform—division into districts further accentuated this trend.\* The effect of all this was for the state administrative apparatus to become even more accessible to the populace and to involve it in running the country. The government extended the forms of mass Soviet activity, reinforced the prestige of the Soviet sections, and set up production groups of deputies whose job it was to see that the production plans of their factories were fulfilled and that socialist emulation was launched. These groups of deputies were, in fact, formed on the initiative of the workers, which demonstrates their concern for better ways and means of making the Soviets more effective. The following is ample illustration of this. In Leningrad, a group of deputies helped the Red Putilovets factory to fulfill their five-year plan obligations ahead of schedule. It is not hard to imagine the implications of this at a time when all national efforts were devoted to the urgent creation of heavy industry. The Soviets may also be credited with much of the success in saving money, raising labour productivity in industry, improving the activity

\* For details, see p. 187 et seq.

of state institutions and bettering urban living conditions.

Apart from socialist industrialisation, the government had to tackle the vastly important problem of transforming agriculture along socialist lines. In that the state was helped by many people who were transforming the family-farm system of small holdings into the collective-farm socialist system, and eliminating the class of kulaks on the way. Backed by the Communist Party, the Soviets organised the mass political activity of the working people to accomplish these tasks.

The new tasks that the rural Soviets had to face in spearheading the collective-farm movement raised the question of giving a legislative form to the reorganisation of the work of the Soviets. Accordingly, the Presidium of *UTsIK* issued on February 3, 1930, the Basic Regulations for Rural Soviets in the USSR and proposed that the Central Executive Committees of the constituent republics be guided by them in drafting legislation on the rural Soviets.<sup>44</sup> It was not until January 1, 1931, however, that *UTsIK* ratified the new regulations<sup>45</sup> that replaced the outdated 1924 statute.

By the new regulations, the rural Soviet was to be the supreme organ of power within the bounds of its allocated area. Its major aims were to supervise the socialist reorganisation of farming, lead the campaign of the farm labourers, poor and middle peasants against the kulaks, and explain to family farmers the advantages of collective farming.

Moreover, the rural Soviets were obliged to examine and ratify production plans of the collective farms, receive accounts of their activity, deal with applications from collective farms for state financial and economic aid, and suspend any illegal resolutions taken by the farms. Further, they controlled land fund usage, and helped to extend the sown area, raise yields and develop animal breeding. They were also in charge of capital construction on the farms and saw to the observation of labour laws and social security.

Under the leadership of Soviets the poor and middle peasants launched a persistent campaign to abolish the kulaks as a class. The Kurovskoi District Executive Committee in the Moscow Region, for example, convened on January

26, 1930, an enlarged plenary meeting with the participation of active workers, farm labourers, and poor and middle collective farmers. Altogether more than a thousand people attended. There was enthusiastic support for one farmer, from the village of Mistsevo, when he said: "We've been molly-coddling the kulaks for a dozen years. And they have exploited our weakness and burrowed their way deeper and deeper into Soviet life, like worms into a healthy body. Enough I say! We've been patient long enough. . . . Ultimately we set about destroying the kulaks as a class. The poor peasants have helped the Party and Soviets with the greatest of pleasure. We approve! And we shall carry on helping."<sup>46</sup>

The Communist Party and the government exposed and balked attempts to undermine or diminish the importance of the rural Soviets in the full-scale collectivisation areas; these were seen as attempts to sap the Soviet authority. It was at this time that the district link in the chain of administrative command was forged. From then on the district was to become a key point of Soviet administration and economic planning both in agriculture and local industry.

Local authorities in town and country had made considerable contributions to implementing the socialist industrialisation and collectivisation programmes, but the Party and government now called upon them to apply their efforts just as vigorously to the new tasks confronting the country. The country had now reached the stage of completing the foundations of socialist society, but that was proving extremely difficult in the complex domestic and foreign situation. Those were the years when the aggressive imperialist states of Germany, Italy and Japan were busy preparing for a new world war and receiving the encouragement and connivance of American, British and French ruling circles. In these circumstances the Soviet Government did all it could to curb the aggressors and prevent the outbreak of war.

Engaged in their peaceful creative labour, the Soviet people embarked on a second five-year plan, in the course of which they would completely abolish capitalist elements and the causes engendering classes and human exploitation. This entailed not merely rooting out the vestiges of capitalism in the economy, but overcoming them in people's minds;

it meant turning all the working people into politically conscious builders of socialism.

The whole crux of the new five-year plan lay in economic reconstruction on the basis of up-to-date technology, completing collectivisation and reinforcing socialist farming, and furthering the cultural revolution.

The Soviets, being the agents of state authority, were of prime importance in implementing the tasks of the second five-year plan. Their job was to draw the widest sections of the workers into making an active contribution to building socialism. But to resolve the new problems the Soviets themselves had first radically to overhaul their activity. The Seventeenth Communist Party Congress had revealed a number of serious shortcomings in their work, particularly in the rather formal and bureaucratic methods used by some bodies. The Congress called on them to put their house in order, stimulate the work of local Soviets and bring them even closer to the people. Much attention was paid to the need to endow the Soviets with equipment, to broaden their powers, make their staffs more business-like and improve their mass work. To these ends a suggestion was made to increase the number of Soviet sections and groups of deputies at factories and in the villages, and to draw far more women into their work.

After the local authority re-elections in 1934 the work of the Soviets conspicuously improved. Their main electioneering slogan had been to carry out the directives of the second five-year plan, and the whole election campaign had been marked by a high level of organisation and political activity among the electorate.

At the end of 1935, a movement for higher productivity and rational application of technology swept the country. It was initiated by Alexei Stakhanov, a coal-hewer of the Central Irmino mine in the Donbas who in one shift dug 102 metric tons of coal instead of the normal eight tons. The Soviets helped to sponsor this movement both among the industrial workers and among the collective farmers. Unprecedented labour enthusiasm gripped workingmen throughout the country, causing them to give their utmost strength, skill and growing craft to fulfil the far-reaching targets of the new plan ahead of time. Their efforts were crowned with success.



THE SOVIETS AT THE END  
OF SOCIALIST CONSTRUCTION  
AND THE TRANSITION  
TO COMMUNIST CONSTRUCTION

Socialism had scored decisive victories in town and country by the mid-1930s. Capitalist elements in the country had completely disappeared and only tiny remnants of small private commodity economy were left in the form of legally-permitted family farms and small workshops of unco-operated craftsmen who exclusively employed their own labour. Two principal forms of socialist property—state and co-operative—provided the undivided economic foundation of the socialist state. Now that the implements and means of production had become public property, the class structure had radically changed: landowners, capitalists and kulaks were evils of the past and society now comprised two amicable classes—workers and peasants, complemented by workers' intellectuals.

With the exploiting classes out of the way, there was no longer any need to retain repressive measures against them, and the government could direct its attention to promoting economic organisation and cultural and educational development that fully accorded with workers' authority at all stages of its evolution. In other words, all the political and social conditions were present for the state of proletarian dictatorship to become the state for the whole people. Proletarian democracy increasingly became socialist democracy for all members of the community.

The 1936 Soviet Constitution, whose adoption opened a new chapter in Soviet history, gave even greater democratic meaning and sophistication to the organs of state power. The Soviets of Workers', Peasants' and Red Army-men's Deputies became Soviets of Working People's Deputies, thus heralding their transformation from agencies representing specific classes into all-embracing popular bodies. The new name reflected society's new class structure; restrictions on suffrage were outmoded and no longer relevant. The new Constitution replaced the system of Soviet congresses by a single system of Soviets, including the Supreme Soviet of the USSR, the Supreme Soviets of the Union and Autonomous Republics, and the local Soviets of Working People's Depu-

ties operating on a sessional basis. Another innovation was the standing committees which, superficially, appeared to have much in common with the former sections but, in fact, differed in essentials. While the sections had often come under the executive committee, the new standing committees were directly responsible to the Soviet.

With the adoption of the new Constitution the Soviets drew even closer to the people, grew in prestige and authority among the electorate. Their accumulated experience in widespread organisation enabled them perceptibly to improve administration of various branches of economic and cultural life.

The 1936 Constitution, therefore, marked the inception of an era in which the Soviet state had entered socialist society and begun the process of turning the proletarian dictatorship state to the all-embracing popular state. Although they had no experience of government, the Soviet workers and peasants had managed to overcome all difficulties and obstacles and pioneered the way to establish a state of a completely new type that was intrinsically part of the people, acting in their name and for their well-being. This new state character had at once been apparent in the government's first measures; it had matured during the grim years of Civil War and foreign military intervention; it had been tempered in the labour of the peacetime five-year plans and in the process of creating a new and strong industry and reorganising agriculture.

"The abolition of the exploiter classes, industrialisation, collectivisation and the cultural revolution were links of a single revolutionary process, which led to fundamental changes in the relations between classes and nations. . . . A new social system resting on the friendship and alliance between the working class, the collective farm peasantry and the people's intelligentsia was created. Socialist principles became firmly rooted in all spheres of social life."<sup>47</sup>

This new social system withstood a severe test in the most barbarous and devastating war the Soviet people had yet had to face in defence of the freedom and independence of their socialist nation. It was the intention of German imperialism to destroy the world's first socialist state and enslave its peoples. But the Soviet people unequivocally demonstrated their adherence to the Soviet system, as innumerable

examples illustrate. Just one example, but one that is extremely typical, was the great partisan movement that sprang up in enemy-occupied regions of Byelorussia, Leningrad, Smolensk, Bryansk and other areas. As much as 63 per cent of Byelorussia, for example, was under the partisan control in 1943.<sup>48</sup> As soon as they would liberate an area, the partisans would set up Soviet administrative bodies and courts and operate Soviet laws. The newspaper *Pravda* of March 19, 1942, reported on partisans in two districts of the Leningrad region who had re-established Soviet authority over an area 120 kilometres long and 80 kilometres deep, and had organised the transportation of provisions to the inhabitants of besieged Leningrad.

The local Soviets that functioned in the partisan areas mobilised the local people for action against the occupation army, provided stocks, transport, shelter and hospitals for the partisans and constructed forest camps to save people from being deported to Germany. They looked after all the farm animals and machinery that had not been evacuated to the rear and even managed to smuggle them across the front line in some instances. In the spring of 1942, for example, people in the partisan area of Vitebsk Region smuggled across the warfront 2,100 tons of wheat, 10,000 tons of potatoes, 35,000 tons of hay, 2,500 horses and 4,000 head of cattle. Partisans of Smolensk, Leningrad and other regions similarly delivered a great many provisions to the rear.<sup>49</sup>

Naturally enough, the war brought certain changes to the work of state agencies, both central and local, and necessitated an overhaul of their structure and organisational forms of their functioning. When the whole economy was put on a war footing, it inevitably involved the state apparatus, gave rise to new bodies required in a state of emergency. In the first year of the Soviet involvement in the war, on July 30, 1941, the Presidium of the USSR Supreme Soviet, the Council of People's Commissars and the Party Central Committee issued a joint resolution setting up the State Defence Committee. This was an extraordinary body responsible for running the country in the political, economic and military spheres. Its local agencies dealt with defence arrangements in the republics, regions (territories), towns and districts and with maintaining public order in wartime.

Not surprisingly, the establishment of the State Defence Committee and its local bodies caused big changes in the work of the whole system of government bodies. It constricted the scope of the highest state authorities now that they had transferred a substantial part of their functions to the State Defence Committee. The Soviets, too, had to reconstruct their activities in accordance with wartime needs. At all levels they now directed the mass effort for national defence and helped to turn the country into a single military camp. In fact, the Soviets made an extremely valuable contribution to the immense effort being undertaken to mobilise and unleash human and material resources for repulsing the nazis; they greatly assisted military bodies in the general mobilisation, in forming and despatching reinforcements, in building defences, in providing the army with food and equipment, and in channelling the popular patriotic enthusiasm into the country's war effort. Deputies and the very widespread active membership collaborated closely with mass organisations to collect funds, warm clothing and other valuable items among the population at large. As a consequence, the nation received many millions of rubles for its defence fund, and servicemen were sent many millions of articles of warm clothing that had been gladly donated by Soviet patriots.

In areas adjacent to the warfront, the Soviets assisted the military command in implementing anti-aircraft defence measures, constructing fortified lines and anti-tank displacements, in obtaining war materials and repairing military equipment, and in evacuating the local populace and factories.

The war caused a certain retreat from the collegial principles of running the Soviets, inasmuch as the need to implement various measures quickly frequently made it impossible to convene a session of the Soviet or a meeting of its executive committee. Even so, the extent of the Soviets' success depended on the involvement of wide sections of the people. At that time, the standing committees based on activists were the most widespread form of workers' participation in the work of the Soviets.

Thus, in wartime the entire activity of the Soviets, both in the rear and behind the lines on enemy-occupied soil (in partisan detachments), pursued the single-minded aim of



driving out the enemy as swiftly as possible. The Soviets with their popular support once more demonstrated, in those intrepid years, the insuperable force of Soviet democracy. The Soviet war achievement showed that there was no force on earth that could conquer men of labour once they had gained their freedom from capitalism and begun a free life. War palpably demonstrated the indivisible link between the Soviets and the people and the great vitality of the Soviets as genuinely popular bodies of state authority. Some twenty years ago, a woman tractor driver, P. A. Angelina, Hero of Socialist Labour and Deputy to the USSR Supreme Soviet wrote: "It is worth looking back on the path we have taken and remembering our country's stirring history which is simultaneously the history of each of us, her people. Our destinies are so closely bound up with the fate of the state and the Party that when we think of our own work and achievements, our trials and tribulations we involuntarily see something a hundred times greater than our personal biographies. All the good we have done, all that we know, everything that makes us wealthy, strong and happy, emanates from one great source—the triumph of Soviet government."<sup>50</sup>

With the war over, the nation was able once more to return to peaceful creative work. The victory had strengthened the country's international position, enhanced its reputation and its role in settling outstanding world issues. This had happened even though the country had suffered greater losses in the war than any other nation, losses that would have spelled the ruin of any state with a different social system. The country lost over 20 million lives, 1,710 cities and more than 70,000 villages were destroyed, some 32,000 industrial installations were demolished, the iron and steel industry lost so many factories that its steel smelting was cut by 60 per cent, and mines producing 60 per cent of the country's coal were destroyed. Agriculture, too, suffered an enormous setback, the nazis plundering and destroying 98,000 collective farms, 1,876 state farms and 2,890 machine and tractor stations. From direct destruction of property alone, the aggregate material losses amounted to 679,000 million rubles.<sup>51</sup> But the figure rises to well over 2,569,000 million rubles if we include military expenditure and loss of income from industry and farming in enemy-occupied areas.

Clearly the task confronting the Soviets immediately after the war was to restore the economy as quickly as possible. That done, the nation could proceed to complete the war-interrupted task of building socialism. The Party and government had, in fact, mapped out a programme of economic reconstruction back in 1943 in a resolution "On Urgent Measures for Economic Rehabilitation in Areas Liberated from German Occupation". The whole country, led by the Soviets, gave help to the liberated areas, and a constant stream of equipment, materials, implements, industrial commodities and provisions flowed into the areas. This period saw the start of the patronage of previously enemy-occupied regions and cities by their more fortunate counterparts elsewhere in the country. The Soviet agencies of Novosibirsk, for example, arranged the patronage by Novosibirsk and the Novosibirsk region of Voronezh and the Voronezh region.<sup>52</sup>

In the tremendous efforts of the initial post-war five-year plan to set industry back on its feet, the local Soviets were in the forefront in organising patronage of factories and supplying them with both skilled and unskilled manpower. In the first half of 1946, for example, the executive committees of the district and regional Soviets in Zaporozhye Region sent some 40,000 people to help out at factories of national and republican importance.<sup>53</sup> Such examples were commonplace at the time, and the selfless all-round efforts quickly showed results: by 1948 industry was completely restored and producing more than pre-war industry had done.

Similarly, the Soviets had considerable work to do in restoring agriculture in the formerly occupied areas. Before the war these areas had provided in excess of 54 per cent of gross farm production.<sup>54</sup> Added to their misfortunes was a severe drought in 1946. Here again, as in industry, regions took responsibility for patronage of other regions. In the three immediate post-war years, for instance, farmers in the Smolensk Region received much of their evacuated stock back; Yaroslavl, Kuibyshev and Ivanovo regions returned to them 62,000 head of cattle, 10,755 horses, 100,000 sheep and goats, 2,229 pigs and 100,000 poultry. Literally thousands of columns with a variety of loads set out from the depths of the country to needy areas.<sup>55</sup>

The vigorous steps taken by the Party and government coupled with the multilateral and energetic work of the So-

viets and of the industrial workers enabled the collective and state farms to restore their war-ravaged agriculture and exceed the pre-war output level in a relatively short span.

With the change-over to peacetime working conditions the Soviets and their executive committees naturally had to modify their forms and methods of work. They were now increasingly concerned with the restoration and promotion of socialist industry and farming, improvements in municipal services, town planning, residential construction, education and health, and in extending trade and improving its quality. It was no longer necessary to retain narrow decision-taking methods, they could now return to collective decision-making and mass forms of administration. The level of the Soviets' organisational work markedly improved and, between 1945 and 1948, departments of instructors and organisers came into being in all Soviets; these departments were largely responsible for assisting subordinate staff, gathering together and disseminating foremost experience in Soviet work, and drawing more and more people into the work of the Soviets. In overhauling the state administrative structure, the Soviets dispensed with many superfluous functions and unproductive expenses. As a result, budget expenditure on maintaining administrative bodies fell from 14,000 million rubles in 1946 to 7,900 million rubles in 1953.<sup>56</sup>

Economic development now warranted a radical improvement in the staffing of the Soviets, since the war had decimated their ranks: 54.1 per cent of executive committee chairmen, 37.4 per cent of their vice-chairmen and 43 per cent of the secretaries had been called up and many had perished. At the first post-war local Soviet elections in 1947, only 42.9 per cent of the earlier elected deputies remained, and over half executive committee members and some 70 per cent of their chairmen were not, in fact, deputies, but had been co-opted.<sup>57</sup> In a number of cases, sessions could not be called and the work of the standing committees was impaired. In order to right the situation, co-option was banned and the principle of electing local authorities was fully restored.

These and other steps taken to improve the Soviets, to encourage more efficiency and rationality, initiative and innovation, and, most important of all, to use and constantly rely on the inexhaustible fund of popular experience, enabled the country to overcome in a relatively brief span its post-

war problems and to tackle successfully the big tasks that lay ahead.

In the 1950s the Soviet Union entered the final stage of building socialism; these were years that saw efforts on all sides to democratise society even more. The 1956 Twentieth Party Congress opened the way for further democratisation of the country and improvement of the system of Soviets. Its resolutions on ideology and culture presented extensive opportunities for advancing Soviet society and underlined the need to encourage the creative initiative of the people. "The great tasks of communist construction," a congress resolution stressed, "require the further raising of popular activity and initiative, increasingly wide popular participation in running the country and in all its organisational and economic activities. To achieve that we must extend Soviet democracy, insistently improve the work of all Soviet bodies at the centre and in the localities, and bolster their ties with the mass of people."<sup>58</sup> The Congress devoted its attention to the need for stimulating the work of the Soviets and of the trade unions, to their greater involvement in economic and cultural matters, to the satisfaction of the population's everyday needs, and to the importance of the communist education of the population. These were to be the guidelines for all the Soviets' future work.

The Party continued to pay a great deal of attention to the activities of the Soviets, whose role in resolving outstanding economic and cultural issues had considerably risen. Their principal tasks for that period were succinctly defined in the Central Committee resolution "On Improving the Work of the Soviets of Working People's Deputies and Strengthening Their Ties with the People" (January 1957). It extended the rights of the local Soviets in economic planning, in production and the distribution of local industry's products, in organising housing, cultural development, local amenities and road building, in tackling finance, and in promoting the output of building materials. Their augmented authority in economic and cultural matters was reflected in their greater legislative activity (especially in that of the USSR Supreme Soviet) and in the growing volume and importance of their decisions.\*

\* See Chapter III.



No less important in extending their powers and improving their organisation were the new statutes adopted virtually in all republics from 1957 to 1959 on rural, district, township, city and, in some republics, regional (territory) Soviets, and also the new laws on recalling deputies from local and republican Supreme Soviets and the USSR Supreme Soviet. Apart from the increasing activity of Soviets at all levels, another development occurred at that time, something peculiar to socialist society: popular participation in running the country through national and republican meetings of personnel from industry, agriculture, science and culture, and republican meetings of leading workers. These meetings often put forward proposals that were to find their way into the statute books.

The next Communist Party Congress, the Twenty-First, confirmed that the country had completed the task of building socialism, secured its final victory and had now entered upon a new period—the period of full-scale construction of communist society. This was followed at the Twenty-Second Congress by the adoption of a new Party Programme which outlined scientifically the way ahead in communist construction. It advanced new ideas on the theory of the socialist state, its development and strengthening as an instrument of communist construction. Among the new Marxist-Leninist tenets was the idea of the proletarian dictatorship state growing into the state of the whole people.

The founders of Marxism-Leninism had stressed that the dictatorship of the proletariat was necessary for the transition from capitalism to socialism. But they made no mention of the nature of the state during the transitional period from socialism to the higher phase of communist society. True, Lenin had allowed for the possibility, during the socialism-to-communism transitional period, of the existence of a state which was to be, in fact, not an instrument of proletarian dictatorship. But he had been unable to define the character of such a state since insufficient experience existed. This is perfectly understandable, for the foremost question in those years, when a bitter class struggle still prevailed, when socialist reconstruction was far from over, was to reinforce the state precisely as proletarian dictatorship. It was only after the complete and final victory of socialism in the USSR that enough historical experience had been gathered to pro-

nounce judgement on the character of the state in the transitional period from socialism to communism.

The huge economic and socio-political changes that had occurred in the mid-1930s undoubtedly affected the nature of the Soviet state, but did not lead at that time to its becoming a state of the whole people. There were several reasons for that. Above all, there remained many people who had belonged to exploiting classes, even though the socialist transformations had removed the economic basis for their existence. It was to take some time before they could be re-educated into socialist citizens.

Furthermore, although collectivisation prevailed in the 1930s, it could not immediately free the peasants of remnants of a private-ownership mentality; it was to take some time before the collective farmers could be utterly convinced of the advantages of collective farming over family farming. Similarly, other non-proletarian sections had to be re-educated. And in republics and regions that had only joined the USSR after the adoption of the 1936 Constitution, the socialist changes were to take time. Finally, to complete the process of forming a state of the whole people, socialism had to triumph irrevocably by precluding any possibility of capitalism ever making a come-back. The ultimate triumph of socialism did not coincide with the elimination of exploiting classes and the complete victory of socialism.<sup>59</sup>

In addition, the growing war threat in the 1930s and the eventual war itself, with all the above-mentioned restrictions on democratic forms of government, did much to hamper the formation of a state of the whole people. Nor was the situation helped by the long existence of the personality cult, a phenomenon quite alien to the socialist system and one that certainly inhibited the flourishing of socialist democracy.

Socialism triumphed finally after the formation and reinforcement of the world socialist community and the breaking of the capitalist encirclement of the Soviet Union. All possibility of restoring capitalism in the USSR was by now completely precluded and the external requisites existed for the Soviet Union to complete the process of forming a state of the whole people. As the CPSU Theses on the fiftieth anniversary of the revolution put it, "The state of the whole people is a new stage in the development of socialist statehood into communist public self-administration. It continues

the cause of the dictatorship of the proletariat—the building of communism—and together with other socialist states wages a class struggle against imperialism in the international arena.”<sup>60</sup>

The present state is a natural outcome of the state of proletarian dictatorship and functions in a society where socialism has completely and finally prevailed. Socialist ownership of the implements and means of production, the single socialist economic system, the absence of class antagonisms, the social, political and ideological unity, friendship among Soviet peoples and socialist patriotism, all converge into one united society. In such circumstances, the state acts in the name of all classes and social groups and is not restricted to a single dominant class or the interests of only part of the community.

At the same time, the new historical stage of development of Soviet statehood marks a new stage in the evolution of the Soviets. As the Party Programme points out, in the course of building communism the Soviets will grow in importance because they are the all-embracing organisational arm of the people and embody their unity.\*

The years of 1959-65 saw a great effort to increase the part played by the Soviets in public life.<sup>61</sup> Local Soviets received more material and financial assistance, their functions became broader and they began to draw more activists into their work. They became responsible for planning local industrial production, building local auxiliary projects, elaborating plans for producing and purchasing farm produce, and supplying factories and farms with materials and equipment. They took on additional responsibility for many enterprises concerned with domestic services, trade and public catering, for part of the housing, schools and pre-school institutions, medical, cultural and educational establishments that had previously come under the republican bodies. They now had more rights in keeping public order, they took over control of local militia stations, and watch commissions were attached to the executive committees of district and town Soviets to see that regulations were observed in prisons and reform institutions. For these purposes, the number of deputies to local Soviets grew considerably and the elected

\* See Chapter VI.

deputies began regularly to report back to their constituents.

The Twenty-Third Party Congress was another landmark in Soviet history; it ratified the directives of a new five-year plan for further economic and social progress. The Congress made it clear that “the main economic task of the next five years is to secure a further considerable growth of industry and high stable rates of agricultural development through the utmost utilisation of scientific and technical achievements, industrial development of all social production and the enhancement of its efficiency, and greater labour productivity, and thereby to achieve a substantial rise in the standard of living and fuller satisfaction of the material and cultural needs of all Soviet people”.<sup>62</sup>

The Congress resolution also underlined the need for an all-round development of socialist democracy and greater responsibility to the Soviets in putting the economic and cultural plans into effect. Accordingly, the Party Central Committee adopted a decision in March 1967 to improve the work of village and township Soviets, i.e., that link in the chain of Soviets which by its very activity is most closely associated with the local population. While exposing several flaws in their functioning, the Central Committee emphasised that their main task was to increase their influence on the economic progress of collective and state farms and factories, and to extend their control over the punctual fulfilment by those organisations of their state plans and obligations; they were to see that collective farms observed democratic principles, made proper use of land resources and observed socialist legality. The decision drew the attention of the Soviets to the need to improve their organisational work among the populace and enhance the role and authority of deputies.

It would be wrong to look on the decision as referring only to the work of the village and township Soviets. It was an important step forward in improving the whole system of Soviets and illustrated the constant concern of the Party for the wider promotion of Soviet socialist democracy.

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To sum up, the Soviets wield all the powers necessary to run the economy, social and cultural affairs, and political



administration. Either they form state agencies themselves directly, or they invest such powers in state bodies for them to deal with their allotted tasks.

The Soviets of Working People's Deputies are the cornerstone of the state structure of the USSR.\* One of their characteristics is that as well as being state authority bodies they are agencies of popular self-administration. They are the most widely-based, most all-embracing and authoritative social organisations inasmuch as they link together all workers of town and country and all nationalities. Lenin used to say: "It is important for us to draw literally all working people into the government of the state. It is a task of tremendous difficulty. But socialism cannot be implemented by a minority, by the Party. It can be implemented only by tens of millions when they have learned to do it themselves."<sup>63</sup>

The Soviets have actually become an organisation which has best been able to tackle the job of teaching the working people to run the country, to manage socialist production on a national scale. They have justified themselves at all stages of development of the Soviet state. Today they remain a school of state management with even greater importance in the new circumstances of communist construction and of the growing initiative and creative activity of the mass of people. The closer Soviet society comes to communism, the wider and more truly democratic forms of Soviet activity become in economic and cultural affairs.

The remaining chapters of this book explain the current functions of the entire spectrum of Soviets.

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> *Fiftieth Anniversary of the Great October Socialist Revolution*, M., 1967, p. 3.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> V. I. Lenin, *Collected Works*, M., Vol. 25, p. 417.

<sup>4</sup> Marx, Engels, *Selected Works* in 3 vols., M., Vol. 2, pp. 220, 222.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. 3, p. 435.

\* See Chapter II.

<sup>6</sup> V. I. Lenin, *Collected Works*, M., Vol. 8, p. 558.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. 10, p. 156.

<sup>8</sup> N. N. Demochkin, *Soviety 1905 goda—organy revoliutsionnoi vlasti* (*The Soviets of 1905, Organs of Revolutionary Authority*), Gosyurizdat, M., 1963, p. 48.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 49 et seq.

<sup>10</sup> V. I. Lenin, *Collected Works*, Vol. 10, p. 244.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 243.

<sup>12</sup> *Trudy Voenno-Yuridicheskoi Akademii* (*Transactions of the Military Law Academy*), M., 1956, Book 22, pp. 67-69.

<sup>13</sup> F. I. Kalinychev, "Soviety kak organy gosudarstvennoi vlasti i samiye massoviye organizatsii trudyashchikhsya" ("The Soviets as Agencies of State Authority and the Most Mass Organisations of the Working People") in *Soviety deputatov trudyashchikhsya v period razvernutoy stroitelstva kommunizma* (*Soviets of Working People's Deputies in the Period of Full-Scale Construction of Communism*), M., 1961, p. 34.

<sup>14</sup> L. F. Karamysheva, *Borba bolshevikov za Petrogradsky Soviet* (*The Bolsheviks' Struggle for the Petrograd Soviet*), L., 1964, p. 96.

<sup>15</sup> B. M. Morozov, *Partiya i Soviety v Oktyabrskoi revoliutsii* (*The Party and Soviets in the October Revolution*), Mysl, M., 1966.

<sup>16</sup> *Novoye vremya*, Petrograd, 24 October, 1917.

<sup>17</sup> *Istoriya Kommunisticheskoi Partii Sovetskogo Soyuza* (*History of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union*), Vol. 3, Book 1, Politicheskaya literatura, M., 1967, pp. 561-62.

<sup>18</sup> *The Laws of the RSFSR*, 1917, No. 12, p. 179.

<sup>19</sup> A. I. Lepyoshkin, *Kurs sovetskogo gosudarstvennogo prava* (*A Course in Soviet State Law*), Vol. 1, Gosyurizdat, M., 1961, p. 363.

<sup>20</sup> *Soviety v Oktyabre. Sbornik dokumentov* (*The Soviets in October. Collection of Documents*), M., 1928, pp. 317-18.

<sup>21</sup> V. I. Lenin, *Collected Works*, Vol. 27, pp. 132-33.

<sup>22</sup> Y. N. Gorodetsky, *Rozhdeniye Sovetskogo gosudarstva* (*The Birth of the Soviet State*), Nauka, M., 1965, p. 499.

<sup>23</sup> V. I. Lenin, *Collected Works*, Vol. 26, p. 106.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. 28, p. 420.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 465.

<sup>26</sup> M. I. Kalinin, *Voprosy sovetskogo stroitelstva. Statyi i rechi (1919-46)* (*Problems of Soviet Construction. Articles and Speeches, 1919-46*), Gospolitizdat, M., 1958, p. 64.

<sup>27</sup> V. I. Lenin, *Collected Works*, Vol. 30, p. 231.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. 26, p. 424.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. 28, p. 139.

<sup>30</sup> V. I. Lenin, *Collected Works*, Vol. 27, p. 410.

<sup>31</sup> For details see *Soviety za 50 lyet* (*The Soviets During 50 Years*), Mysl, M., 1967, p. 117.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 119.

- <sup>33</sup> V. I. Lenin, *Collected Works*, Vol. 28, p. 310.
- <sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 314.
- <sup>35</sup> I. A. Gladkov, *Ocherki sovetskoi ekonomiki, 1917-20 (Essays on the Soviet Economy, 1917-20)*, Gospolitizdat, M., 1956, p. 36.
- <sup>36</sup> V. I. Lenin, *Collected Works*, Vol. 30, p. 265.
- <sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. 35, p. 449.
- <sup>38</sup> *Soviety za 50 lyet*, p. 181.
- <sup>39</sup> V. I. Lenin, *Collected Works*, Vol. 28, p. 36.
- <sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. 26, p. 113.
- <sup>41</sup> *Sovietskoye gosudarstvo i pravo*, No. 10, 1967, p. 26.
- <sup>42</sup> V. I. Lenin, *Collected Works*, Vol. 29, p. 183.
- <sup>43</sup> *The Laws of the RSFSR*, 1926, Sec. 1, No. 50, Item 384.
- <sup>44</sup> *Laws of the USSR*, 1930, Sec. 1, No. 16, Item 172.
- <sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 1931, Sec. 1, No. 11, Item 142.
- <sup>46</sup> *Soviety za 50 lyet*, p. 260.
- <sup>47</sup> *Great October, Fifty Years of Great Achievements of Socialism*, Progress Publishers, M., 1967, p. 27.
- <sup>48</sup> G. D. Komkov, *Istoki pobedy sovetskogo naroda v Velikoi Otechestvennoi voine (Sources of Victory of the Soviet People in the Great Patriotic War)*, M., 1961, p. 44.
- <sup>49</sup> *Uoprosy istorii*, 1954, No. 7, p. 137.
- <sup>50</sup> Quoted in A. Konovalov, *Mestniye Soviety deputatov trudyashchikhsya (Local Soviets of Working People's Deputies)*, Krasnodar Publishers, 1957, p. 3.
- <sup>51</sup> L. Volodarsky, *Zabota Sovetskogo gosudarstva o naselenii osvobodivnykh raionov (Concern of the Soviet State for the Population of Liberated Areas)*, Gosplanizdat, 1945, pp. 6, 7.
- <sup>52</sup> *Soviety za 50 lyet*, p. 371.
- <sup>53</sup> *Izvestia*, 11 June, 1946.
- <sup>54</sup> *Soviety za 50 lyet*, p. 376.
- <sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 377.
- <sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 362.
- <sup>57</sup> *Iz istorii deyatel'nosti Sovetov (From the History of Activity of the Soviets)*, Mysl, M., 1966, p. 85.
- <sup>58</sup> XX syezd Kommunisticheskoi partii Sovetskogo Soyuza (20th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union), Verbatim Report, Vol. 2, Gospolitizdat, M., 1956, pp. 422-23.
- <sup>59</sup> *Politicheskaya organizatsiya sovetskogo obshchestva (The Political Organisation of Soviet Society)*, Nauka, M., 1967, p. 28.
- <sup>60</sup> *Fiftieth Anniversary of the Great October Socialist Revolution*, p. 39.
- <sup>61</sup> *Soviety za 50 lyet*, p. 438, et seq.
- <sup>62</sup> *The 23rd Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union*, M., 1966, p. 321.
- <sup>63</sup> V. I. Lenin, *Collected Works*, Vol. 27, p. 135.

## CHAPTER 2

### CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SOVIETS

#### DISTINCTIVE FEATURES OF THE SOVIETS AS REPRESENTATIVE STATE BODIES

One of Lenin's most notable achievements was his idea advanced in April 1917 of creating a Republic of Soviets as a state form of proletarian dictatorship. "Having capitalised on the experience of the Paris Commune and the three Russian revolutions, Lenin developed and concretised the theory of Marx and Engels on proletarian dictatorship and demonstrated the profound historical significance of the Republic of Soviets, a new type of state that was far more democratic than any bourgeois parliamentary republic."<sup>1</sup>

If popular initiative from the revolutionary classes, Lenin affirmed, had not created the Soviets, the proletarian revolution in Russia would have been futile.

The more than half-century existence of the Soviets has fully confirmed their vitality and superiority as a new form of state organisation, both at the time of proletarian dictatorship and afterwards, when that dictatorship gave way to the state of the whole people. This chapter sets out to explain why it was that of all feasible types of state organisation the republic of Soviets became the most expedient form of state authority in Russian conditions. It further expounds the most distinctive features of the Soviets which helped to liberate the working people from the yoke of capitalism and to build the new communist society.

The first thing to note is that the Soviets, being agencies of popular representation, are *the most democratic, all-embracing organisation of the people* enabling them to run the state themselves. The Soviet people, as Lenin once said, know no other authority over them than that of their own union expressed most coherently in the Soviets of Working People's Deputies. The Soviets have always been the most mass organisations and no other social organisation—trade union, co-operative or the Young Communist League (*Kom-*



*somol*)—have ever rivalled them in breadth of popular representation. As distinct from other organisations that represent a union either of office and factory workers, or of young people, or of co-operative members, the Soviets cover all working people without exception throughout the country, irrespective of their ethnic or national group, sex, age, faith, education, social origin, property status and past activities. Moreover, when socialism was still being built, they covered the bulk of the population; nowadays they represent every single member of the community and have become truly all-embracing popular organisations and embody the unity of the people. As Lenin put it, they most fully accord with the purpose of genuine popular rule, being sovereign, all-powerful bodies and the highest form of democracy.<sup>2</sup>

The 1936 USSR Constitution proclaimed: "All power in the USSR is vested in the working people of town and country as represented by the Soviets of Working People's Deputies." That above all is evident from the truly representative composition of Soviet deputies who are overwhelmingly not professional politicians but people engaged in factory or farm work, doing their civic duty in their free time. They come from factories and mines, mills and building sites, collective and state farms, universities and schools, cultural and scientific institutions; they embrace all manner of trades and professions: miners, steel workers, tractor drivers, oil engineers, agronomists, doctors and writers, etc. Since they are elected by the people the Soviets are made up of envoys of all classes and social groups, all sections of the community. This is a feature of all levels, from the highest down to the lowest authorities. The 1970-elected USSR Supreme Soviet, for example, comprised 481 industrial workers (31.7 per cent) and 282 collective farmers (18.6 per cent) or put together 763 workers and farmers (50.3 per cent). The Supreme Soviets of Union and Autonomous Republics are just as representative in their composition. Of the 8,873 deputies elected to them in June 1971, 2,687 were industrial workers, 1,710 were collective farmers and 4,476 were office and professional workers. Similarly with the local Soviets: at the 1971 polls, 65.3 per cent of the successful candidates were industrial workers and collective farmers; the remainder were intellectuals. These figures forcefully demonstrate that the Soviets represent all social

groups and really are organs of popular rule; they embody the alliance of the working class and the peasants, which is the essential foundation of the Soviet state.

Figures such as those above call to mind what Lenin said in his "What Is Soviet Power?" He was writing then of the essence of the new authority which many countries could not or would not understand: "The nature of this power, which is attracting larger and larger numbers of workers in every country, is the following: in the past the country was, in one way or another, governed by the rich, or by the capitalists, but now, for the first time, the country is being governed by the classes, and moreover, by the masses of those classes, which capitalism formerly oppressed."<sup>3</sup>

The Soviet state was only two years old when Lenin wrote those words. The country lay in ruins, famine was rampant, factories were idle, and the country was attacked on all sides by internal and external counter-revolutionaries. Yet Lenin, being the great revolutionary and realist that he was, even in those desperate days foresaw the triumph of the Soviets and their grand future.

Today the socialism that Lenin mapped out has come into being and people of the new generation can, from their own experience, plainly and clearly see what exactly Soviet power entails.

To Lenin's question "What Is Soviet Power?", people respond variously. L. V. Kripinevich, for example, deputy to the Mogilnyansky Village Soviet in Brest region answers: "... What is Soviet power? I owe everything to Soviet power. It made a man of me. A real man! My father used to say his work was the devil's invention. But I've received the Order of Lenin, the highest government award, for my simple peasant work. I've been elected deputy. Do you understand what that means? My grandfather and father couldn't write their own names, yet my Vasily has done postgraduate work and is now a chief engineer. Nikolai, too, is a chief engineer after graduating from an institute. Vladimir is an army captain. Tatiana has graduated from a technical school and Victor is just finishing. Nadya has got her school certificate. ... That's what Soviet power means to me."

Another witness, Sakin Begmatova, Vice-Chairman of the Council of Ministers and Foreign Minister of Kirghizia, has this to say: "If it hadn't been for Soviet power I would

have been put to service with some rich man at the age of twelve or earlier. And my fate would have been the same as that of other Eastern women, the most deprived, ignorant and forgotten people. The Soviet government gave us light. . . . As Kirghiz Foreign Minister I have represented the Soviet Union in the United Nations and even spoken there. Every time I have been away from home I have thought how wonderful it was to represent the Land of Soviets where the life and welfare of every citizen is the paramount interest of the Party and the state."

The last testimony comes from F. I. Chaban, a teamleader at the 21st Party Congress Mine of Dobropolugol Trust: "Thanks to my own Soviet power for everything; for my children studying in a Soviet school—like thousands of other miners' children, for the work of my wife and myself, and for our evening institute studies. For me Soviet power means respect for a miner's work, our complete welfare, firm confidence in tomorrow and the feeling of being master of our country."

The aggregate figures given above for various levels of representative bodies of Soviet state authority may be thought to obscure a less representative picture in certain individual cities or areas. For that reason we bow to the old adage that "the town is the face of the country" and refer specifically to several cities. One of the oldest Urals industrial centres straddles the wooded hills close to the Europe-Asia border, around it lies an untold abundance of minerals—iron ore, pyrite copper ore, malachite and marble, gold and platinum, and precious stones. All this wealth has provided the basis for intensive industrial production around the town of Nizhny Tagil, itself a child of the revolution. There was no town there at all in 1913. Only 35,000 inhabitants dwelled in the township attached to the factory. Today, the population of Nizhny Tagil is close on 400,000. Factory workers, engineers, technologists and mine workers define the working profile of the city—but they also make up its administration. Among the 1,155 deputies to the ward Soviets and the city Soviet, 630 are industrial workers and 307 are specialists at industrial concerns. Of the local Soviet members 73 are iron and steel workers, 57 are engineering workers, 40 miners, 48 building workers and 17 chemical engineers.

Take another city, Podolsk, a satellite of Moscow with a

population of 160,000. The heart of the city is its industrial enterprises: nearly half the inhabitants, 74,000 people, work at the Orjonikidze Engineering Plant, the Kalinin Mechanical Engineering Works, the cable factory and thirty eight other industrial concerns. Who are the city fathers? The 350 deputies to the Podolsk City Soviet. And of these deputies 46 per cent are industrial manual workers, the remainder are engineers, teachers, doctors and office workers at local institutions. Chairman of the Executive Committee of the City Soviet is Sergei Marasanov. After trade school, he worked many years as craftsman's assistant, then craftsman and mechanic, gaining his technical qualifications by correspondence at an engineering college.

These examples of Nizhny Tagil and Podolsk local government are not unrepresentative, they are a perfectly normal feature of Soviet politics, and typical for any town or village, for all regions and republics of the Soviet Union. In some parts, the Soviet and its agencies may work better or worse, but every single Soviet is tied by a thousand strands to the working people, it consists of working people and functions on their behalf and under their supervision. There lies the crux of Soviet government, the *raison d'être* of socialist democracy.

The above-mentioned statistics bear out the text of the Appeal to the Soviet people made on November 4, 1967 by the Central Committee of the Communist Party, the USSR Supreme Soviet Presidium and the USSR Council of Ministers: "*Our self-assigned task has been to establish a new socialist state, a new socialist democracy that personifies government of the people for the people. And we have fulfilled that task. . . . Life's creators have become its masters. The people who create all material and spiritual wealth—the hewers of coal and ore, the smelters of metal, the tillers of the soil, and the pathfinders of the atom and space research—are now in command.*"<sup>4</sup>

A Marxist-Leninist understanding of popular rule, however, cannot be restricted to political power. Only someone who owns the means of production and all of society's material and spiritual wealth can really be a master of life. For that reason, Soviet-implemented rule implies a *union of political and economic power*. The power of the Soviet people in the political field is supplemented and reinforced



by power in the economic sphere as well. That is embodied in Article 6 of the Constitution: "State property, i.e., public property, shall comprise the land, its mineral wealth, waters, forests, the factories, mills, mines, railways, water and air transport, the banks, means of communication, large state-run agricultural enterprises (i.e., state farms, machine and tractor stations, etc.), municipal institutions and the bulk of housing in the cities and industrial areas."

Consequently, all public wealth, as well as political power, is the property of the Soviet people. That is the deepest source of Soviet socialist democracy. Beside having dominion over people, the Soviet socialist state also has dominion over material things, over economic affairs. Once it became the owner of all the really decisive implements and means of production, it employed its immense economic potentiality for securing undivided domination of socialist property in all spheres of the national economy, for augmenting public wealth, for substantially improving the standard of living of all working people and raising their level of culture.

That the Soviets are all-embracing popular organisations determines their position as the *basis of the entire socialist statehood*. All authority in the Soviet state belongs to the Soviets of Working People's Deputies and they form the basis of the entire system of state bodies, the whole state apparatus from top to bottom. This situation is juridically inscribed in Article 2 of the Constitution: "The Soviets of Working People's Deputies shall constitute the political foundation of the USSR." This implies that all other state bodies (if they are not elected directly by the population)—the organs of state administration, the courts and the Procurator's Office—derive from the Soviets. They are formed, appointed or elected by the Soviets, are empowered directly or ultimately by the Soviets and, in all their activity, are accountable to the Soviets.

All levels of state authority create their executive and administrative bodies, i.e., agencies of state administration, which are subordinate to and under the control of the organs of state authority that formed them. All administrative bodies set up by the Soviets function on the basis of the laws and decisions of the Soviets and higher state bodies.

Furthermore, both higher and lower bodies of state au-

thority elect the judiciary—the USSR Supreme Court and the Supreme Courts of the Union and Autonomous Republics, territory and regional courts, area and city courts, that is, all courts except the people's courts which are elected directly by citizens. The Fundamentals of the Judicial System of the USSR, the Union and Autonomous Republics make all these courts responsible to the bodies that elected them, i.e., to the corresponding levels of Soviets. When they implement the law, the courts observe laws issued by the higher agencies of state authority—the USSR Supreme Soviet, and the Supreme Soviets of the Union and Autonomous Republics. The USSR Supreme Soviet appoints the Procurator-General of the USSR who is in charge of the entire system of the Procurator's Office. The Procurator's Office sees that people keep to the letter of the laws adopted by higher state bodies.

In that way the Soviets, being genuinely representative popular bodies, hold all power in the country, resolve all the paramount issues concerning the state and supervise the day-to-day direct running of the economy, the affairs of cultural and social life. They do so by distributing and guiding work in a rational and expedient way among the various agencies of the Soviet state subordinated to them: the state administrative agencies, the judiciary and the Procurator's Office.

No agencies other than the Soviets have a direct mandate from the people, by virtue of which they have the right most fully and consistently to represent the people and to exercise plenary power, i.e., their paramountcy and sovereignty. This constitutes the democratic principle of the whole Soviet system inasmuch as the Soviets, being representative popular bodies, form the basis of all state bodies and the entire state apparatus.

Further, since they are the most widely-based and democratic organisation, the Soviets are a *profoundly internationalist form of state authority*. In the very first days of its inception the Soviet government proclaimed the principle of equal rights for all nationalities, irrespective of their race. It abolished for all time all forms of national oppression and abrogated all previously existing national privileges and restrictions. At the same time, it put its faith in co-operation between the working people of the most diverse nationalities and smoothed the way for their unification in a single,

fraternal state union. The Soviet Union formed under the leadership of Lenin in 1922 is precisely such a state union of peoples.

The Soviet government bases its national policy on the Leninist tenet that socialism does more than simply maintain national distinctions and peculiarities, it ensures that the economy and culture of all nations and nationalities grow and blossom comprehensively. This tenet is embodied in the organisation and activity of Soviet state bodies which guarantee the combination of the common interests of all Soviet people and the specific national interests of each Soviet nation in particular.

Another important characteristic of the Soviet system is that it *combines legislative and executive powers* in the elected representatives of the people. The Soviets are genuinely working institutions and have none of the negative features of the traditional parliamentary system where an omnipotent state apparatus actually decides affairs of state behind a facade of representative bodies. The Soviets are the type of representative bodies that not merely take the necessary decisions and exercise control over their implementation, they also directly put them into effect with the people's backing. The Supreme Soviets, for example, do more than legislate. Local Soviets do more than adopt decisions and resolutions, give instructions and carry out the general supervision of state affairs in the localities. Through their deputies and an extensive body of active workers, through the various organisational forms of activity they have a hand in putting the laws and decisions into effect. This is one of the most important distinctive features of the Soviet republic. As Lenin once pointed out, "... the parliamentarians themselves have to work, have to execute their own laws, have themselves to test the results achieved in reality, and to account directly to their constituents. Representative institutions remain, but there is *no* parliamentarism here as a special system, as the division of labour between the legislative and the executive, as a privileged position for the deputies".<sup>5</sup> The Soviets are precisely such representative institutions.

Because broad popular representation is properly combined with the structure of the Soviets as constantly operating elected bodies, they become really working institutions.

At first glance it may appear that at the end of a Soviet session, which is comparatively brief, the work of the Soviet ceases until the next session. That is not so. In fact, it continues its work between sessions in other forms like the presidiums of the Supreme Soviets, the standing committees, the executive committees of local Soviets. Soviet deputies carry on their business among the people, in their constituencies. There they draw necessary information about the needs and demands of their constituents, about important economic problems of a particular district or the country as a whole. On that basis the deputies prepare amendments to the current legislation and improve the work of the state apparatus. Furthermore, by elucidating laws and resolutions to their constituents, they encourage the populace to put them into action.

All of this maintains the continuity of state administration and effectively combines legislative and executive functions.

The next feature of the Soviets is that they are *agents of state authority proper and at the same time the most widely-based workers' organisations*. This was most fully and comprehensively apparent when socialism had established itself and communist society was being built. It is the Soviets that comprise the basis of state power, of the entire state apparatus, and of all state bodies in the USSR. Soviet people run their state and resolve numerous major political, economic and cultural issues of nation-wide importance through their representatives in the Supreme and local Soviets. Each Soviet exercises authority over all spheres of state, economic and cultural work in its area. As organs of state authority, the Soviets are empowered to carry out the tasks entrusted to them. They make laws (Supreme Soviets) and resolutions (local Soviets) that are binding on all state bodies, officials and citizens within their given territory. All legally-binding acts adopted by the Soviets to express the will of the entire nation are carried out voluntarily and accompanied by explanatory and organisational work to convince the populace of their worth. Nevertheless, they are backed up, where necessary, by measures of state compulsion against individuals who break the rules.

A wide-ranging system of executive and administrative bodies exists to carry on the day-to-day work and qualified



management of various branches of the economy, of social and cultural life and political administration. The Soviets endow them with the necessary plenary powers, guide them and exercise control over their activities.

At the same time, the Soviets are the most widely-based *non-government, social organisations*, with over two million deputies. Besides being answerable to the people the deputies, as delegated members of the Soviets, carry out their obligations on a voluntary, unpaid basis and retain the job they had before they were elected to the Soviets. In this way the Soviets maintain a very close connection with the working people and rely constantly on them. They are, in fact, organisational and political centres around which are formed the mass independent organisations that embrace millions of Soviet people for tackling civic matters. This is in itself eloquent testimony to the consistent implementation of Lenin's precept that "the people themselves ... united in the Soviets, must run the state".<sup>6</sup>

Naturally, no impenetrable wall separates the state and social principles in the functioning of the Soviets. They are interconnected and actually work together. The more the activity of the Soviets rests on mass support and public opinion, the more likely it is to bear fruit.

The unity of state and social principles within the Soviets and the growing role of the mass organisations in all spheres of communist society open up for the Soviets the far-reaching prospect of socialist statehood gradually growing into communist public self-administration.

All these distinguishing features of the Soviets show that the USSR is the first country to have the simplest and most democratic representative system in history. "Compared with the bourgeois parliamentary system," Lenin once said, "this is an advance in democracy's development which is of worldwide, historic significance."<sup>7</sup>

Lenin foresaw that the transition from capitalism to socialism in other countries was bound to produce a variety of political forms. Nonetheless, they would share certain essentials, like the dictatorship of the proletariat. Inevitably, all nations would arrive at socialism, but not all of them would arrive by the same route; each country would add its own specific features to the various forms of democracy, to the various forms of proletarian dictatorship. Historical

experience has fully borne out that forecast. Today, proletarian dictatorship states exist and are growing strong in a number of countries in Europe, Asia and Latin America where the general laws of socialist revolution and socialist construction are applied creatively to specific circumstances.

Lenin's description of the Soviets and their distinctive features has universal significance, since it expresses the typical aspects of both Soviet government and of state authority in other socialist nations. It is quite possible that in future, popular revolutionary initiative will engender other political forms of transition to socialism. But this does not detract from the historic importance of the republic of Soviets as the first socialist state on whose experience other nations may rely while taking due note of the specific historical conditions in their own countries in building a new society. In 1918 Lenin proclaimed that "our socialist Republic of Soviets will stand secure as a torch of international socialism and as an example to all the working people".<sup>8</sup>

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As a form of political organisation of the working people the Soviets are an immense gain, but however important the form may be, it cannot guarantee success by itself. What does matter is the very essence of the Soviets, the interests of which class they serve in given historical circumstances. The entire course of the Soviet socialist state shows that the Soviets primarily need communist guidance to bring out fully the tremendous advantages vouchsafed in Soviet government and their employment for the good of socialism. In the period of communist construction the role and importance of the Party are growing as the guiding and motive force of Soviet society in political, economic and cultural spheres.

The reasons for the enhanced role of the Party today include greater socialist democracy, increased popular activity and the involvement of wider sections of the populace in running state and economic affairs. While the mass organisations link their members on production, age, economic sector or other principles, the Communist Party is quite untrammelled by any departmental, local or trade interests. It represents a higher form of social and political organisation of the people and the vanguard of the whole Soviet people.

All the successes of the Soviet nation emanate from the heroic effort of the Soviet people and the huge organisational and educative activity of the Communist Party; they emanate from the cautious implementation of the Leninist general Party policy. The Party indicates the goals and elaborates the means of achieving them, it sees that all government and non-government institutions accurately follow the set policy. The Party's guiding instructions lie behind all economic, state and cultural plans. Most important Party decisions are taken at Party congresses and at plenary meetings of the Party Central Committee. They are concerned with essential problems of building communism and are based on the accumulated experience of the people, the creators of a new life. These Party resolutions outline the programme of action of all Soviet state bodies at a particular stage of their development. Party decisions and directives are then given legal form in laws and decrees and in other acts of the higher bodies of state authority at the various levels of responsibility.

The Party unifies, co-ordinates and implements political and organisational guidance of the work of all government and non-government organisations. In determining the ways and means of guiding the Soviets, the Communist Party acts on the Leninist principle that, while guiding the Soviets and their central and local agencies, it cannot and must not take their place. This policy was laid down in early 1918 at the Eighth Congress of the Russian Communist Party (Bolsheviks); a Congress resolution stressed that Party leadership of the Soviets *should be exercised within the bounds of the Constitution*. The following Party congress took this a step further by declaring that "... Party organisations should in no circumstances pursue the aim of replacing the Soviets or in any way compete with them. All work of Party organisations in this sphere should be through the appropriate Soviet bodies".<sup>9</sup> These principles governing the relations between Party and state bodies fully retain their importance today.

The directing and guiding role played by the Communist Party in Soviet society is a constitutional principle of the Soviet state enshrined in Article 126 of the USSR Constitution. Party leadership of the Soviet state is there defined as being primarily through the Soviets; the most important

forms of the leadership are: a) defining overall policy at all levels of the Soviets on major issues concerning the state, economy and socio-cultural affairs; b) directing work in selecting, distributing, promoting and training personnel; and c) controlling the Soviet activity and supervising the implementation of Party directives by Soviet authorities.

That the Party guides the Soviets does not imply that the Party and state power are one and the same. The Party has no administrative rights in regard to other workers' organisations, and Party guidance does not entail commanding or replacing other organisations. Party leadership is based exclusively on persuasion, ideological influence and moral authority.

The General Secretary of the CPSU Leonid Brezhnev has written: "The purport of Party leadership is to ensure the inviolable ideological and political unity of the whole society, and the purposeful and co-ordinated development of all the components of the social organism. We do not have and cannot have any political organisation other than the CPSU which would take into account the interests and the specific features of our classes and social groups, of all nations and nationalities, and of all generations and would embody these interests in its policy. The Party takes care that even the smallest streams of everyday activity harmoniously merge into a single mighty torrent."<sup>10</sup>

The Party directs the activity of the Soviets, from the village Soviet up to the USSR Supreme Soviet, through Party groups in which all Communists take part as deputies of the respective Soviet. These groups also exist on the Executive Committees and are made up of all Communists serving on the committees. Their chief job is to ensure the greater all-round influence of the Party and the execution of its policy among non-Party people, tighten Party and state discipline, and the supervision of Party and Soviet directives. Experience, in fact, shows that these Party groups are extremely influential.

The growing importance of the Communist Party in all spheres of state and public life and the enhanced Party leadership of the Soviets testify to the unity and solidarity of the Soviet people around their vanguard.

The Party has always displayed concern for strengthening the Soviets. The Party outlined measures for heightening the



role and improving the activity of the Soviets as state bodies, and increasing their ties with the people. This is a task that emanates from the objective laws of development of the socialist state and of Soviet democracy in all spheres of social life. Socialism presupposes the vital creative force of millions of people and reliance on the people; their ever-growing enthusiasm and initiative are a further prerequisite for building communism. Brezhnev has said that "making for communism means increasingly involving the working people in practical work associated with running the state, economic and social affairs".<sup>11</sup>

The Soviets, as we have seen, are an all-embracing popular organisation, the backbone of the entire socialist state. One of the key modes of strengthening the Soviet state and promoting the activity and creativity of more and more people, therefore, is to boost the part played by the Soviets. They supervise all state activity in constructing the material and technical basis of communism, the formation of new social relations and the communist education of the people.

The Soviets have unlimited opportunities for making active organisational incursions into the economy. As the 23rd Congress underscored, "special attention is attached to enhancing the role of the Soviets of Working People's Deputies to enable them fully to exercise their powers regarding economic and cultural development and seeing that decisions are carried out, to enable them to show more initiative in settling questions pertaining to planning, finances and land, in directing local industries and service and cultural facilities for the population. The Soviets must enhance the responsibility of executive bodies, deputies and functionaries to the people, activate the work of their sessions and submit a broader range of questions for consideration."<sup>12</sup>

In implementing the 23rd Congress resolutions on enhancing the work of the Soviets, the Supreme Soviets have substantially extended the range of economic, social, cultural and state issues to be submitted for consideration. These issues are cardinal to the promotion of industry, agriculture, construction, education, science, culture, health, trade and social security.

As the Soviets are developing today, they are becoming more democratic and observing all the democratic princi-

ples peculiar to their work. They are also constantly improving themselves as agencies of state authority and popular self-government. This requires the regular reporting back of the Soviets and their deputies to the electors, the right of the electorate promptly to recall deputies who have lost their confidence, a wide degree of publicity, free and comprehensive discussion at Soviet sessions of all major issues concerning state administration, economic and cultural development, the regular accounting of executive bodies at Soviet sessions from top to bottom, checking the work of all bodies and control over their activity, regular debating in the Soviets of deputies' questions, and criticism of faults in the work of the Soviets, economic and other organisations.

Born in the October Socialist Revolution, the Soviets as agencies of the new authority have become under Communist Party guidance a powerful weapon for revolutionising society, and an effective means of building socialism and communism. Their further development should lead to a situation where the professional state apparatus will gradually fade away as an increasing number of people acquire the habits of administration and the work is no longer the preserve of a special profession.

The Communist Party Programme envisages that the development of the socialist statehood will gradually lead to its transformation into public communist self-administration which will embrace the Soviets, trade unions, co-operatives and other mass organisations. This will bring a further development of democracy and will guarantee the active participation of all members of the community in running public affairs.

#### MAIN PRINCIPLES OF ORGANISATION AND ACTIVITY OF THE SOVIETS

After examining the distinctive features of the Soviets as representative state bodies, it is logical at this point to explain the principles on which their organisation and activity rest. Lenin, the founder of the Soviet socialist state, first elaborated these principles and they became embodied in the political organisation of Soviet society. With due account for the new specific historical conditions and guided by the

creative method of Marxism-Leninism, the Communist Party is constantly improving the Leninist principles of organisation and activity of the Soviets.

The principles include the following:

- a) unity of all agencies of state authority;
- b) mass participation in state administration;
- c) elective nature of the Soviets;
- d) equal rights of all nationalities and consideration for national features;
- e) democratic centralism; and
- f) socialist legality.

#### *Unity of all agencies of state authority*

The unified system of Soviets embraces both higher and lower state organs, so that all Soviets, from the USSR Supreme Soviet down to the smallest village Soviet are direct state agencies which are formed on the common principles of the Soviet electoral system. No intermediate links connecting the centre with the localities exist between the highest and lowest bodies. In the villages, districts and towns there do not exist, nor can there exist, any representatives of the central authority standing above the local bodies or even on the same footing as the latter. The difference between various levels of Soviets in competence, in the extent of rights and duties, like the difference between the local Soviets and Supreme Soviets, does not infringe upon their organisational unity. This is determined by the socialist substance of state authority in the USSR.

The uniform system of Soviets, headed by the USSR Supreme Soviet consists, as mentioned above, of 15 Union republican Supreme Soviets, 20 Autonomous republican Supreme Soviets, 120 regional and territorial Soviets, eight Autonomous regional Soviets, 10 National area Soviets, more than 2,800 district Soviets and nearly 45,000 village, township, town and ward (in large cities) Soviets. This great ramification is due to the immense area of the USSR and the federal structure of the Soviet state, which comprises the most diverse nation-state formations and administrative-territorial units. In spite of this ramification and the multi-form character of the state bodies, the USSR contains no opposition of centre to localities; there exists no contradiction between the highest and lowest authorities.

Although various types of authoritative bodies exist, this does not imply a division of authority, even less that one authority is counterposed to another. Legislative and executive functions are combined and this obviates a separation of legislative from administrative bodies. Similarly, the judiciary and the Procurator's Office are not independent of the representative bodies of state authority.

Furthermore, all representative bodies are elected on the uniform principles of electoral law, all other state agencies being formed and empowered by representative bodies, and being answerable to and under the control of them. Lenin saw the democratic essence of Soviet state agencies in the unity and indivisibility of state authority, inasmuch as this principle entails the concentration of all power in the hands of organs of *popular representation, the most widely-based organisations of the working people.*

Given this unity and indivisibility, why, one might ask, is there a need for different types of Soviet state bodies? Experience has provided the answer. Since the Soviets do not just debate major affairs of state, but they take part in carrying them out, they are themselves incapable of taking on the huge volume of diverse activities in all spheres. Hence the reason for creating a ramified network of organs of state administration, the judiciary and the Procurator's Office. Although in essence the system is unified, the state organs function in a variety of forms.

The different activity of such state bodies as the Supreme Soviet, the Council of Ministers, the Supreme Court and the Procurator-General does not mean that *the authority of each is counterposed to that of the others; it rather means a sharp delineation of their competence within one system of state authority.* Consequently, unity and indivisibility of authority are not confronted by different types of state bodies, which in one form or another and within certain limits carry out the functions of the single state authority. All the state bodies have their common social basis, express the single will of the entire Soviet people and are based on common democratic organisational principles. Their activity is co-ordinated in common tasks and has a single end.

Today, this activity is aimed at the creation of the material and technical basis of communism, at the transformation of socialist into communist relations, at the implemen-



tation of control over labour and consumption, the provision of a higher standard of living, the safeguarding of the rights and liberties of Soviet citizens, of socialist law and order and socialist property, the education of the people in a disciplined, political consciousness and communist attitudes to labour, the guaranteeing of the country's defence and security, the promotion of fraternal co-operation with socialist nations, support for world peace and normal relations among all countries.

Each type of state body has its own ways and means of implementing the common tasks and attaining a single aim.

#### *Mass participation in state administration*

The people and state authority are two forces that stood opposed to one another, hostile and irreconcilable, for thousands of years. On the one hand stood the state, on the other the common people. Socialism removed the wall separating the people from power, largely because the state itself stopped being a machine repressing the people and became the people's own instrument affirming real social justice.

The extensive participation of the working people in running the state expresses the very essence of the Soviet state as a state of the working people. Wherever the people are in power there can be no thought of building a new society without popular support, without the growing enthusiasm and initiative of the working people, without the involvement of the populace in government. Socialism itself is the vital creative force of the working people. At the dawn of the Soviet state, Lenin made the forecast that "...with every step Soviet power takes the number of people will constantly grow who have completely thrown off the old bourgeois notion that a simple worker and peasant cannot administer the state. Well, if he sets to doing it, he can and will learn!"<sup>13</sup> It was precisely in the running of the state by the people that Lenin saw a "marvellous means" of multiplying the might of the Soviet state, setting into motion tens of millions of Soviet people, mobilising their enthusiasm and creative initiative for building communist society.

During the early stages of Soviet government, various forms of workers' participation in state administration appeared: workers' committees to control production, committees of the poor, worker promotion to state institutions,

sections and commissions of local authorities and various voluntary societies. In the first decade of Soviet government alone as many as 12,500,000 people took part in state affairs as deputies to Soviet congresses and members of Soviets and their executive committees. In the years to follow, when socialism was won and the exploiting classes had gone, popular participation in state administration became even more extensive.

The Party Programme pinpoints the main direction of socialist statehood during communist construction as entailing "the active participation of all citizens in the administration of the state, in the management of economic and cultural development, improvement of the government apparatus, and increased control over its activity".<sup>14</sup> This it regards as an objective law-governed process. The great aim of having every citizen take a hand in running the state is primarily attained by creating better material and cultural conditions for every Soviet person, by improving such democratic institutions as popular representation, nation-wide discussion of the biggest state and communist construction issues, by extending public control and by regularly renewing personnel in the representative state bodies.

Election of deputies to state bodies is the most mass form of workers' participation in running the state. By electing these bodies and controlling the course of the whole election campaign, Soviet citizens thereby take part in deciding cardinal issues of the country's social and political life. Popular participation in running the socialist state is, moreover, not confined to forming the Soviets. What matters is their actual working, since they are the direct organisations of the working people; they have a hand in the work of the standing and *ad hoc* committees of government bodies and in the activity of a variety of mass organisations. Through their numerous representatives in Supreme and local Soviets, the people run their own state and tackle all manner of political, economic and cultural matters. Those elected by the people to supreme bodies of state authority ratify economic growth plans and the state budget, and adopt bills.

Suffice it to say that altogether over 20 million deputies have worked in local Soviets since the adoption of the 1936 Constitution. The Soviets rely for their activity on a vast multi-million army of volunteers. This vital popular initia-

tive created a great variety of forms of participation in resolving state affairs: committees for blocks of flats, voluntary public order squads (*druzhiny*), comrades' courts, parents' committees in schools, women's councils, and various voluntary councils attached to cultural and health establishments. Their chief concern today is with organising the practical solution of problems involved in the building of communism. They are, as a rule, not endowed with state powers and they fulfil their functions by establishing various rules of a non-judicial nature. Decisions taken by voluntary organisations are implemented by force of public opinion, by dint of moral authority.

Bodies such as these have greatly increased their influence in Soviet society. One sees more of the *druzhinnik* with his red armband striving to help keep the peace and see that citizens observe the norms of socialist community; the scientist or doctor, agro-engineer or workingman who go after work to an establishment to help with the "big decisions" of commerce, culture and health in their district or town; the old-age pensioner or housewife who willingly carries out the instructions of a deputy or a house committee; the public supervisors whose eagle eye helps to keep order and legality. . . . One could go on and on. They all take part in the work of the Soviets, acquire experience, join in very diverse state activity, and learn by their own practical experience the work of state administration. Today the number of active voluntary unpaid workers in the Soviets is as many as 23 million, a figure over ten times greater than the number of Soviet deputies or official representatives of authority. In effect, every sixth or seventh adult participates in the work of the Soviets.

The number of deputies, too, is constantly on the increase. Since 1939, when local Soviets were first elected on the basis of the 1936 Constitution, the number of local Soviet deputies has grown by some 800,000. In part this is due to the general population increment, but it largely emanates from the involvement of more popular representatives in state activity.

The Soviets are a great school of government for millions of working people. They teach people the art of leadership and help them to deal in practical terms with major issues related to life in towns, villages, districts and regions.

Because they regularly renew their staff, they enable more and more people to graduate from their schools of state administration. Every fresh election actually entails a renewal of the deputy body.

Since 1957 the country has seen eight elections to local Soviets. At each election nearly half the body of deputies has been renewed, the figure for 1971 being 50.1 per cent. The same holds true for the deputy bodies of the Supreme Soviets of the Union and Autonomous Republics and for the Central Soviet Parliament. Of the 1,517 deputies elected to the seventh Supreme Soviet of the USSR 992 had never held office before; 846 deputies, or 55.8 per cent of the total, who had never held office before, were elected to the eighth Supreme Soviet of the USSR.

This constant fluidity has a beneficial effect on the work of the Soviets, since they are constantly replenished by a stream of new talent. Over the years thousands upon thousands of talented organisers, state officials and economic administrators have emerged from the people and passed through the Soviet school of management.

The most profound sources of the Soviet state's invincible power lie in the extensive involvement of the people in running the state.

#### *Elective nature of the Soviets*

The electoral system mirrors one of the most widely-based, all-embracing forms of popular participation in state management and most completely expresses the consistent democratism of Soviet state authority. It patently reveals the essence of the social system inasmuch as the electoral system is at one with the social system.

Truly free and democratic elections—elections without exception or restriction—have become possible in the USSR because real power at both ends of authority belongs to the people, because the socialist economic system has put an end to exploiting classes. By virtue of this factor, elections take place in an atmosphere of co-operation of workingmen, farmers and intellectuals, in an environment of mutual trust and friendship, because all the material conditions are present for electoral rights to be fully utilised.

Nobody in the Soviet Union is interested in thwarting the will of the working people and this in itself prevents any



kind of pressure on the electorate. As a result citizens are guaranteed real freedom to express their will.

According to the 1936 Constitution and the constitutions of Union and Autonomous Republics, elections to all representative state bodies, from rural Soviets up to the USSR Supreme Soviet, are conducted on the basis of *universal, equal and direct suffrage, by secret ballot*.

*Universal suffrage* in the USSR means that all Soviet citizens of 18 and over, irrespective of race, nationality, sex, creed, education, social origin, property status, past activity and whether they lead a settled or nomadic life, have the right to vote for all representative state bodies. Women enjoy exactly the same rights to vote and stand for election as men. Similarly, servicemen enjoy the same rights as civilians.

After the law passed in December 1958 on removing an individual's voting rights by court decision as an additional punishment, there remained only the quite understandable exception under the Constitution of people certified as being of diminished responsibility, i.e., mentally unsound. The age qualification for candidates for election to the USSR Supreme Soviet is 23, for republican Soviets 21, and for local Soviets 18.

The principle of popular sovereignty, therefore, broaches no possibility of any restriction on universal suffrage, no qualifications' limitations on voting for any organ of authority except that of age.

Universality of electoral rights is further guaranteed by the whole procedure in organising and conducting elections: the procedure for compiling voters' lists, organising electoral precincts, fixing the election date on a non-working day, and an opportunity to vote for candidates currently outside their place of permanent residence (e.g., in hospital or away on business).

Soviet citizens make full use of their vote. Practically the entire adult population participates in the elections. Thus in June 1971 99.95 per cent of all electors voted in the elections to local Soviets; over 99 per cent voted for candidates of the popular bloc of Communists and non-Party people. Voting in the elections to the eighth Supreme Soviet, held in June 1970, were 153,172,213 persons, or 99.96 of the

electorate; over 99 per cent voted for the candidates nominated by this bloc.

The active participation of practically the entire electorate in the elections is positive proof of their political consciousness, of their interest in the consolidation and development of Soviet statehood.

*Equal* voting rights are both proclaimed and effectively guaranteed. This means that every citizen has one vote and equal rights at the polls. No voter has special privileges or advantages over others. Women and men, servicemen and civilians, voters of any nationality or ethnic group equally enjoy the right to vote and stand for election, they all have equal opportunities to take part in the formation of state agencies. This is ensured by allowing voters to be registered on no more than one voters' list. Moreover, electoral districts for all Soviets are single-member constituencies, and each district is equal in population size. This guarantees that an equal number of voters send an equal number of deputies to the representative state bodies; in other words, one vote is the equivalent of any other vote.

The *direct* principle of electivity is consistently applied so that deputies are chosen for state bodies directly by the voters, i.e., without any intermediary elections. That this direct system is democratic is apparent inasmuch as every voter knows for whom he is voting and who is expected to report back to him. Direct elections to all state authorities facilitate control by the voters over the activity of deputies and enhance the responsibility of the people's choice.

All elections are conducted by *secret ballot*, which entails a voter casting his vote without other people knowing for whom the vote is cast or interfering in that vote. Secret balloting is a prime guarantee of the expression of the electorate's free choice; when they vote for their deputy the electors may feel free and independent. At the same time, it is a reliable means of controlling the activities of the deputies. The electoral law provides for screened polling booths; nobody except the voter is allowed inside the booth, and that includes members of the electoral commission. The voters' lists contain no signs or marks which might enable officials to identify the voters who cast their vote for any particular candidate. Any infringement of secret balloting is a crime in the eyes of the law. Furthermore, no canvassing is per-

mitted inside the polling station while voting is in progress, for otherwise it might inhibit the free choice of the electorate. This procedure guarantees Soviet people complete freedom to vote for whoever they wish, whoever they trust to look after their interests.

A democratic procedure for organising and conducting elections exists in the USSR to ensure universal, equal and direct voting by secret ballot. It consists of compiling voters' lists, forming electoral districts and precincts, forming electoral commissions, nominating candidates for election, counting the vote and sending in the returns. All this procedure is laid down in the Electoral Regulations.

*Voters' lists* are of great importance since only that person can vote who is registered on a particular list. It falls upon the executive committees of the Soviets to take great care in compiling the lists of voters and including everyone who has reached the age of 18 and resides within the area of the respective Soviet (with the exception of the legally certified insane). After compiling the lists they are gone over scrupulously, well in advance of the election so that any chance error or inaccuracy might be spotted quickly and put right. Anyone changing address after the list is drawn up may be granted a Voting Certificate which he can use to cast his vote elsewhere.

Elections to all Soviets are conducted in *electoral districts*. They are formed in accordance with the established procedure for representation in voting for a given Soviet and elect only one deputy. So as to bring the polling stations as close as possible to the electorate, electoral precincts are formed for the adoption of ballot papers. These precincts make it as convenient as possible for electors to register their vote and remove the slightest difficulties in the exercise of their rights.

Soviet citizens are also active organisers of the elections. *Electoral commissions* (central, district and precinct) have the job of conducting the elections and seeing that real popular control is effected over the course of the elections. It is within their competence to see that the Electoral Regulations are carried out to the letter, and to examine all voters' submissions and complaints. Precinct electoral commissions accept ballot papers and count the votes cast. District electoral commissions are responsible for registering candi-

dates for the appropriate Soviet, for counting votes and making the returns for their district, and providing successful deputies with election certificates.

Millions of people take part in the work of the electoral commissions particularly in the polls for local bodies. In the 1971 local Soviet election, for example, over nine million people worked on the electoral commissions. They are formed on genuinely democratic lines, their members being nominees of such legally-registered organisations as trade unions, co-operatives, Communist Party branches, youth groups, cultural, technical and scientific societies and other mass organisations and workers' societies, and of general meetings of industrial workers and state farmers. Consequently, the working people themselves, via their mass organisations or at their meetings, decide to whom they will entrust the election organisation and control.

Democratism of the Soviet electoral system is further manifest in the *procedure for nominating candidates for deputies*. Nomination is a nation-wide affair involving literally tens of millions of people. This is no doubt helped by the procedure for nominating and discussing candidates, a procedure that is exceptionally simple and accessible. Any Soviet citizen can nominate a candidate as long as he is of age and enjoys voting rights. No financial deposit has to be made and no property restrictions exist as they do in some capitalist countries. Someone put up for election will have no expenses to bear for an election campaign.

Mass organisations and associations have the right to nominate candidates; they include Communist Party organisations, trade unions, co-operatives, youth organisations and cultural societies. The nomination is made by central and local bodies of these organisations and by general factory and office meetings, meetings of servicemen in their units, of farmers on collective farms and in villages, and of rural workers at state farms.

Bearing in mind that all able-bodied citizens work in the USSR and are associated by the nature of their working activity in one of the above-named organisations, this existing procedure, in fact, affords all citizens the widest opportunities to have a say in the nomination of candidates. In practice, nominations take place exclusively at general meetings. And this is not fortuitous, for Soviet people are all



linked in many ways by the work they do at factories, institutions, state and collective farms. Thus, anyone present at a meeting can make a nomination proposal, as also can any mass organisation. During the nomination process the candidates are given the widest publicity in the press, and their personal and vocational qualities are debated at meetings, so that the most worthy and best qualified person is chosen. Leaflets on candidates are published, articles about them appear in the press, their pictures and short biographies come out, they appear and meet their prospective voters. The best buildings—theatres, palaces of culture and clubs—are used for the pre-election meetings.

The district electoral commission is duty bound to register all nominees according to set legal procedure, enter their names on the ballot paper and publish the results of candidates' registration within a set period of time. According to Soviet practice, mass organisations actually put forward, as a rule, only one candidate for registration by the district electoral commission, the candidate being the common Party and non-Party nominee for the given electoral district. The fact that only one candidate is nominated may cause people to wonder whether this in any way inhibits electoral freedom. The fact is that the number of candidates nominated in electoral districts is legally unlimited. The various organisations can and do nominate several candidates for one and the same electoral district. But, by virtue of the fact that the USSR contains no hostile classes and no competing political rivals, mass organisations are able to agree on a single candidate. For the purposes of nomination, district election meetings are held with representatives of various factories, offices, collective farms and other organisations in the electoral district. The participants discuss all the nominees and then come to an agreement on putting forward one common candidate for that district and gain his agreement to stand. At the same time, they appeal to all constituents to vote for the nominee and elect specially entrusted persons to be responsible for canvassing. Naturally, when the nominees are put forward, the prospective voters have every chance to reject unsuitable candidates if they do not measure up to necessary requirements, and they may be replaced. Unsuccessful candidates either withdraw their own nomination or get their backing organisation to do so.

The upshot of all these preparations is that only one nominee is registered in each electoral district and Soviet people make sure that he is the most suitable. This in no way infringes upon the citizens' freedom of choice.

The actual *polling* is, of course, a key stage in the whole election procedure. The Electoral Regulations provide for the best possible conditions for really free voting. For this purpose, polling takes place on a non-working day so that everyone can cast their vote. The hours of polling are confined to a single day and are from 6 a.m. to 10 p.m.; sixteen hours are considered long enough to give everyone a chance to register their vote.

When voting is over, the precinct electoral commission begins to count up the votes. The nominating agencies are represented by specially authorised members of mass organisations and societies, and pressmen may also be present during the counting of votes. The vote is considered valid if more than half the electorate in the given district has cast their vote. Only if the candidate gets an absolute majority (i.e., 50 per cent plus one vote) of total votes is he elected. In the event of less than half the registered voters exercising their right to vote or the candidate receiving less than half the votes cast, fresh elections must be held no later than a fortnight after the first ones.

So the entire procedure of organising and holding elections, from compiling voters' lists and nominating candidates to casting votes and making the returns, is to ensure that every voter may have a real chance of discharging his civic duty, can take part in the polling without hindrance and freely express his opinion at the polls for representative state bodies.

Besides being truly democratic elections to higher and lower representative bodies, Soviet elections are a means of giving the people a practical influence over government, enabling them to control the activity of the various bodies at all levels. To effect this control they have a great variety of effective means; this in itself demonstrates one of the most paramount features of popular democracy.

We have seen how all stages of the election, from nomination to counting votes and making the returns, come under the irremissible control of the electorate. But the voters' functions do not end there. In fact, they extend throughout

the term of office of each Soviet. The link that is established between voters and candidates during the election campaigns sets the seal on a firm association between the people and their deputies. As the real masters of the country, the people keep constant control over the activity of their delegated officers.

Soviet deputies are all actively engaged in building communism and do not lose contact with their permanent trade or profession. They combine their official duties with day-to-day work at their jobs, which they are able to do because of the sessional nature of Soviet representative institutions. Regular convocation of Soviet sessions enables them to examine the most important economic, political and cultural issues within their respective areas, while at the same time not distracting them for long from their main jobs.

The Soviet state and political institutions guarantee to the electors the essential rights and real possibilities for acting upon the work of Soviet deputies, chief among these being the mandatory duty of the deputies to report regularly to the voters, the instructions given to deputies by the voters, the right to recall a deputy from any Soviet, provided he has not justified their confidence.

The duty of every deputy to give the electorate an account of his actions and of the work of his Soviet is fixed by the Soviet Constitution. With each passing year these reports to the voters are becoming more regular. By way of illustration, in 1969 over 95 per cent of the local Soviets reported back at 207,384 meetings, at which the Executive Committees accounted to nearly 37.4 million people. These accounts serve as an effective means of controlling the work of each and every deputy.

The *mandate* from the electors defines the whole line of conduct of the Soviet deputy and obliges him directly to stand by the instructions throughout his work as deputy. These instructions are not a request or the simple wish of the electorate; they express the people's will. They are carefully discussed at pre-election meetings, are ratified and formulated in a special resolution of the meeting, and they reflect the opinion of all or a majority of the electors in a particular town or electoral district. Matters included in the instructions range from economic to cultural business, issues of vital concern like housing construction, municipal

amenities, planning, better transport and communications, education, medical and consumer services, better socialist law and order, and protection of citizens' rights.

During the RSFSR local Soviet elections in 1967, the electorate issued 400,000 instructions, most of which had already been carried out by the 1969 elections.

The Executive Committees regularly report back to the electorate on the implementation of their instructions and bring the matter up for discussion at Soviet sessions. In fact, deputies of the USSR Supreme Soviet and the republican Supreme Soviets also take an active part in carrying out the voters' instructions.

As one example, the Presidium of the USSR Supreme Soviet received the minutes of a meeting of electors from the Zhdanov collective farm in the Aravan District of the Kirghiz Republic. As many as 1,132 constituents turned up at the meeting. Deputy M. Umarova, Hero of Socialist Labour and collective-farm team leader, reported on the implementation of the electors' instructions. The meeting then discussed the report, voiced full approval of the deputy's work, reiterated its confidence in her initiative and persistence in helping to comply with their instructions. With the help of local Soviets and Party bodies, the boards of collective farms and economic organisations managed to achieve a great deal, particularly to build new motorways and repair old roads, to inaugurate a bus service between populated areas, build new schools, pre-school institutions on several farms, a boarding school and a club in the district centre, provide water mains on some collective farms and dig out artesian wells in outlying pastures.

Another instructive example is the work of the USSR Supreme Soviet deputy, K. V. Kopysova, superintendent of the Kuryinskaya hospital in the Krasnogorsk District of the Udmurt Autonomous Republic. She established firm and permanent contacts with her constituents, knew their needs and requests well. On a number of occasions she visited various villages in her electoral district, met her constituents and worked to effect their instructions. What was possible to do in the locality she did with the full backing and participation of her constituents. In the Valamoz township, for example, they were having difficulties finding enough places for children in nurseries. The question had been brought up



many times. Finally, public and economic organisations got together to solve the problem by building both a crèche and a kindergarten. As a result 50 children could attend a nursery school, and another 50 places were made available by a local factory. K. V. Kopysova brought some instructions to the attention of the USSR Supreme Soviet. During the parliamentary debate on the State Budget, she pinpointed the need to increase funds for the Udmurt Republic for the construction and repair of hospitals, schools and other health and education institutions, and for the acquisition of equipment and motor transport for rural hospitals. Her proposals were supported and a further 756,000 rubles were advanced for health and education needs in the Udmurt Republic.

How can the electors guarantee that their deputies will strictly carry out their instructions? The guarantee lies in the electorate's right of immediate recall of their deputies. Lenin saw in this right "the truly popular nature of the Soviets".<sup>15</sup>

Article 142 of the USSR Constitution gives a precise description of the responsibility and accountability of Soviet deputies to their constituents. It not merely obliges every deputy to report back to his constituents on his work and the work of his Soviet, but also states that every deputy may at any time be liable to recall by decision of a majority of constituents. This principle is now entrenched in the constitutions of all Union and Autonomous Republics. Underlying the recall procedure legislation are the democratic principles common for all representative state bodies, enabling the electors to express their will. Both the elections and the recall are matters for the electors themselves.

In making their choice at the polls, the voters are fully aware of their responsibilities and this normally ensures that the best men and women are chosen for the job. Consequently, the number of deputies who are recalled is relatively small. Nonetheless, the right of recall remains an effective weapon in the people's hands to use against deputies who betray their trust. And it is used. During the term of office of the fifth and sixth USSR Supreme Soviets, for example, the electorate recalled ten deputies; in 1968 they recalled as many as 541 local Soviet deputies who had either

lost their constituents' confidence or who had done something unworthy of the lofty title of deputy.

*Equal rights of all nationalities and  
consideration for national differences*

Article 123 of the Soviet Constitution categorically proclaims the equal rights of Soviet citizens, untrammelled by ethnic or national affiliations in all economic, state, cultural and socio-political spheres. Any direct or indirect infringements of these rights or, conversely, the establishment of direct or indirect privileges for citizens on account of their race or nationality, as well as any advocacy of racial or nationalistic exclusiveness or hatred, are punishable by law.

The various nationalities of the USSR established their national states (Union and Autonomous Republics) and nation-state formations (Autonomous regions and National areas), used them to promote their national statehood and to take an active part in running the state. At the present time the USSR has 53 national states and nation-state formations, which means that many, even the small nationalities in the Soviet federation have their own national state or nation-state formation. The country has 35 national states (15 Union and 20 Autonomous Republics) and 18 nation-state formations (8 Autonomous regions and 10 National areas). Each one has its own state agencies.

The Communist Party has always adhered to the Leninist idea that Soviet government should become understandable to the people in Russia's outlying areas and that agencies of the national republics and regions should be made up "predominantly of local people who know the language, the way of life, mores and customs of the local peoples".<sup>16</sup>

The underlying principle of the pattern and activity of all state bodies is the extensive representation of all Soviet nationalities in state agencies. This principle is embodied in the bi-cameral structure of the supreme body of state authority in the country—the USSR Supreme Soviet.

The Presidium of the USSR Supreme Soviet, like the Presidiums of the Supreme Soviets in the Union Republics, mirrors the federal character of the Soviet state and the equal rights of all nationalities. These bodies contain representatives of all Union and, correspondingly, of all Autonomous Republics. All nations and nationalities inhabiting the Soviet

Union are widely represented in the Supreme and local Soviets. In fact, the Supreme Soviet of the USSR is a living embodiment of the firm friendship of all the peoples of the Soviet Union; it represents 62 nationalities among the deputies. Moreover, more than 120 nations and nationalities have their representatives in the local Soviets. It is certainly true to say that all organs of state power and administration at national level, in the Union and Autonomous Republics, regions, territories, cities, districts and villages contain popularly-delegated officials who are well acquainted with the way of life, customs and psychology of the local population, and administer local affairs in the native language. That ensures the observance not merely of common interests, but also of specific interests associated with the peculiarities of the history, economy, geographical location, and level of social and cultural development of the population inhabiting the area of a particular Soviet.

#### *Democratic centralism*

We have seen how wide and ramified the system of Soviets is. The differences between the various levels of Soviets in competence, the extent of rights and obligations, and the differences between local and Supreme Soviets do not in any way distort their organisational unity. This unity, the co-ordinated actions of all types of Soviets, the proper inter-relationship between the centre and the localities, is effected through the principle of democratic centralism which is the main organisational principle of the socialist statehood. It ensures centralised leadership effected through the higher bodies of the Soviet state with maximum consideration for local conditions. At the same time the local Soviets that administer economic, cultural and political affairs on their own territory link their own local needs and interests with those of the state as a whole.

There are various forms of manifestation of democratic centralism. Above all it is apparent in the elective nature of all levels of Soviets, that is, all Soviets are elected directly by adult members of the community. Furthermore, all executive and administrative bodies set up by the Soviets are accountable to them and under their control. Democratic centralism presupposes the responsibility of deputies to their constituents, the right of the electors to recall their dele-

gates if they lost their trust. In the USSR there are not, nor can there be, any state officials who are appointed to their posts for life. The possibility of replacing a state official at any time also reflects the democratic essence of the principle.

All these democratic principles in the formation, the system and the activity of state bodies are bound up with centralism. Centralism entails the strict observance of state discipline, direction of lower agencies by higher and the latter's control over the former; it means that all enactments of higher bodies are unconditionally binding on lower bodies, which must bring their own enactments in line. It would have been impossible to build and maintain socialism without such provisions.

The socialist state is, therefore, not only centralised, it is democratically centralised, relying on extensive popular support and utilising the vital initiative and creative powers of the people in their effort to build a new social system. Democratic centralism entails the unity of the two mutually connected principles—centralised leadership, on the one hand, and democratism, consideration for local conditions, popular initiative, a variety of ways and means of attaining the common goals, on the other. This principle is especially evident in the organisation and activity of state administrative bodies, and in particular, in their dual subordination. A local administrative body is subordinate (a) vertically—to the agency immediately superior to it, and (b) horizontally—to the appropriate local Soviet. Thus, the local executive committees, being subordinate to the Soviets they elected, are simultaneously subordinate to the executive committees of Soviets immediately above them. Their departments and boards, as well as coming under the executive committees, are also subordinate to the same departments and boards immediately above them. For example, a district cultural department comes under the district executive committee and the board of culture of the regional executive committee.

This organisational principle, first, guarantees the required uniform action by state bodies and subordination to a single plan and, second, enables the state apparatus to have a direct link with the populace and take account of local differences. The system of dual subordination serves as



a prime guarantee against bureaucratic centralisation. Lenin insisted that dual subordination was needed wherever it was necessary to take account of inevitable differences as, for example, in agriculture, industry and trade, and to take account of the peculiarities of districts which mark them off in economic and social conditions, and geographical environment, and in the national make-up of the population. The principle of democratic centralism guarantees the centralised administration of the country, the strictest discipline, economy of manpower and resources, and comprehensive consideration of local peculiarities.

#### *Socialist legality*

Socialist legality is one of the basic principles of the activity of Soviet society. Essentially it signifies the precise and undeviating observance and implementation of laws and other enactments by all state bodies, officials and ordinary citizens. This serves to safeguard the Soviet system from all encroachments and to protect the lawful rights of citizens and their organisations.

Today, when the Soviet people are engaged in carrying out the far-reaching tasks they have set themselves in the various spheres of the economy and culture, public organisation, legality and law and order are of the utmost importance. As L. I. Brezhnev emphasised in his speech to the electors of the Bauman electoral district in Moscow in June 1970, "the consolidation of legality, the strengthening of socialist law and order, is a task of overriding state and Party importance".

Soviet laws express the popular will, ensconce the social and state system that reflects Communist Party policy, and are the most important means of putting that policy into effect. The Constitution and other laws lay down the procedure for setting up all Soviet state bodies, their structure and competence, the rights and duties of all citizens, express the underlying principles of labour organisation and distribution, determine the nature of relations in the economic, social and cultural spheres of activity. Lenin put great store by legality, regarding it as a method of building and strengthening socialist statehood, as a rational approach to the work of the government apparatus, as a way of inculcating the habits of disciplined behaviour. He saw the unified so-

cialist legality as the basis of the work of the state apparatus, and he demanded a uniform understanding and application of laws, the establishment of a single legality for the entire federation of Soviet republics despite any local differences and in the face of any local influences.

The principle of a uniform legality remains unimpaired by the consolidated sovereignty of Union Republics, the extension of their powers in the sphere of legislation, and granting them the right to issue their own law codes, because these codes are based on the USSR Constitution and the respective all-Union fundamentals of legislation binding on all republics. As the Party Programme says, "The Party's objective is to enforce strict observance of socialist legality, eradicate all violations of law and order, abolish crime and remove all the causes of crime."<sup>17</sup>

Without the strict observance of legality everywhere it would not be possible to build communism, strengthen the state and improve the work of its apparatus. The country has today a firmly-based and inviolable legal system so that every citizen can rest assured that nobody can with impunity impinge on his legal rights, that the state sternly protects his interests and shows the keenest interest in getting all citizens to exercise the rights and liberties that have been guaranteed.

Under the Soviet Constitution all Soviet state bodies must always be guided by law and ensure the protection of the rights and interests of Soviet citizens. In fact, direct references to this are contained in articles of the USSR Constitution on the competence of the Presidium of the USSR Supreme Soviet, the Soviet Government, organs of state administration, local authorities, the courts and the Procurator's Office. The Constitution makes the organs of state power and administration responsible for the observance of socialist legality.

Local Soviets have particular responsibility in seeing that the requirements of socialist legality are met, for the Constitution empowers them to ensure the safeguarding of state law and order, observance of the laws and protection of civil rights (Article 97). Executive committees of the local Soviets constantly strive to ensure that socialist law and order is kept, that public safety on their territory and socialist property are protected.

## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> *The Centenary of Lenin's Birth*. Theses of the CPSU Central Committee, M., 1970, p. 21.
- <sup>2</sup> V. I. Lenin, *Collected Works*, Vol. 25, p. 486.
- <sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. 29, p. 248.
- <sup>4</sup> *Obrashcheniye k Sovetskoyemu narodu, ko vsem trudyashchimsya Soyuzu Sovetskikh Sotsialisticheskikh Respublik (Appeal to the Soviet People, To All Working People in the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics)*, Politicheskaya Literatura, M., 1967, p. 7.
- <sup>5</sup> V. I. Lenin, *Collected Works*, Vol. 25, p. 424.
- <sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. 24, p. 107.
- <sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. 26, p. 104.
- <sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 472.
- <sup>9</sup> *KPSS v rezolyutsiyakh... (The CPSU in Resolutions...)*, Part I, Issue 7, 1953, p. 499.
- <sup>10</sup> *Great October. Fifty Years of Great Achievements of Socialism*, p. 95.
- <sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 40.
- <sup>12</sup> *23rd Congress of the CPSU*, M., 1966, p. 298.
- <sup>13</sup> V. I. Lenin, *Collected Works*, Vol. 26, p. 469.
- <sup>14</sup> *The Road to Communism*, M., p. 548.
- <sup>15</sup> V. I. Lenin, *Collected Works*, Vol. 26, p. 339.
- <sup>16</sup> *KPSS v rezolyutsiyakh... (The CPSU in Resolutions...)*, Part I, Issue 7, 1953, p. 716.
- <sup>17</sup> *The Road to Communism*, M., p. 552.

## CHAPTER 3

### THE SUPREME SOVIET OF THE USSR

#### THE HIGHEST REPRESENTATIVE BODY OF STATE AUTHORITY IN THE USSR

Being the highest representative body of the Soviet people and wielding supreme state authority, the Supreme Soviet of the USSR is the pinnacle of the system of Soviets. As such, it commands attention; whatever it says is carefully studied and every major decision it takes often evokes wide response both at home and abroad. All the threads of top-level management of the Soviet state lead back to the USSR Supreme Soviet. All other higher bodies are responsible and accountable to it; only it has the right to pass national laws.

Because it expresses the sovereignty of the entire Soviet people, the Supreme Soviet represents the vast Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, the initial constructor of communism. It is a truly popular parliament.

Clearly, the direction of activities of any legislature depends above all on its composition, and on this count the USSR Supreme Soviet is a widely representative body, expressing the interests of workers, farmers and intellectuals, i.e., the whole Soviet people. It is elected by the whole adult population of the country.

The constitutional requirement is for the Supreme Soviet to be elected every four years on the basis of universal, equal and direct suffrage by a secret ballot. All Soviet citizens, except the certified insane, have the right to vote once they have reached the age of 18. The minimum age limit for deputies is 23. The only restriction is therefore one of age, and all nationalities, men and women, irrespective of social origin, property holdings, past activity and religious creed enjoy equal rights at the polls. The same applies to all servicemen.

After the adoption of the Soviet Constitution in 1936, the USSR Supreme Soviet had its first sitting on Decem-



ber 12, 1937. Since then it has received an absolute majority of votes at each successive election.

The table below gives the full election results:

Election date	Voting for the Soviet of the Union		Voting for the Soviet of Nationalities	
	Absolute figs.	% of electorate	Absolute figs.	% of electorate
12.12.37	89,844,271	98.61	89,063,169	97.75
10.2.46	100,621,225	99.18	100,603,567	99.16
12.3.50	110,788,377	99.73	110,782,009	99.72
14.3.54	120,479,249	99.79	120,539,860	99.84
16.3.58	133,214,652	99.57	133,431,524	99.73
18.3.62	139,210,431	99.47	139,391,455	99.60
12.6.66	143,570,976	99.76	143,595,678	99.80
14.6.70	153,771,739	99.74	153,543,228	99.79

The last election quoted, for 1970, had over 153 million people, i.e., virtually 100 per cent of Soviet people 18 and over, voting for candidates for the eighth Supreme Soviet. In composition the deputies reflect the social structure of Soviet society, the friendship and genuine equality of all nationalities and peoples in the country. Although they represented the most extreme ends of the occupational, age, educational and national spectrum, they are united in their devotion to the cause of the working people, the cause of communism. Only the best of the best, those who have distinguished themselves in work and public activity, the most worthy sons and daughters of the Soviet land take their seats in the USSR Supreme Soviet.

A special book containing brief biographies of all Supreme Soviet deputies is published after each election. It is worth considering, however fleetingly, because it provides convincing evidence that Soviet legislators are primarily working people. The factory worker, the politician, and the inspired artist are invaluable to the people for their labour, for their contribution to the common good. It is not electoral expertise in the election campaign, not behind-the-scenes political machinations, but an appreciation of a person's work record, his wholehearted and selfless

dedication to the common good that ensures him his mandate as deputy to the USSR Supreme Soviet.

The electorate judges a deputy primarily on his record of practical work in implementing the grandiose plans for building communism, in satisfying the electorate's wishes and in carrying out its instructions.

At the 1970 polls, of the 1,517 deputies elected to both houses of the Supreme Soviet, 481 (31.7 per cent) are industrial workers, and 282 (18.6 per cent) are collective farmers. In other words, people directly engaged in production make up half of the deputies (50.3 per cent). If we add the state and public officials factory managers, the heads of institutions, various specialists who graduated from the workshop floor or from the fields, these two categories make up an absolute majority. A further 146 deputies (9.6 per cent) work in science, culture, literature and the arts.

Furthermore, 421 deputies (27.7 per cent) are non-Party and 463 (30.5 per cent) are women. The latter figure exceeds the proportion of women in all the bourgeois parliaments taken together. As many as 62 nationalities are represented and this vividly illustrates the close friendship of all Soviet peoples and testifies to their genuine equality. A high proportion of the deputies are young people: 281, or 18.5 per cent, are under 30.

The educational level of deputies has risen with each new Supreme Soviet, so that among the 1970-elected deputies, 48.4 per cent had a higher education, and a further 32.5 per cent had an incomplete higher or secondary education.

One typical factor is that 846 of the 1,517 deputies, or 55.8 per cent took their seats for the first time, which is some indication of the rapid turnover of members in the supreme state body and the influx of hundreds of fresh people at successive elections. Finally, 35 deputies are currently Heroes of the Soviet Union, 231 are Heroes of Socialist Labour, 49 Lenin and 95 State prize winners, and as many as 1,229 hold national orders and medals for outstanding labour and military services.

By composition, therefore, the USSR Supreme Soviet is the plenipotentiary assembly of envoys of the working people and expresses the interests of workers, peasants, intel-

lectuals and all nationalities of the USSR. Its deputies are delegated to look after their vital interests.

Each deputy takes part in discussing and adopting the laws of the Soviet state, in their implementation, and in supervising the activity of agencies of state administration. As the supreme representative body of the Soviet state, the USSR Supreme Soviet enjoys exceedingly broad powers. According to Article 31 of the USSR Constitution, it exercises all the rights conferred on the Soviet state that are beyond the competence of its subordinate agencies: the USSR Supreme Soviet Presidium, the USSR Council of Ministers and its ministries. That means that, in principle, any question related to overall state administration may come under the scrutiny of the USSR Supreme Soviet and it may pronounce judgement on any such issue. There lies one of its striking prerogatives as the expression of the will of the entire Soviet people. By virtue of its wide representative character, however, it cannot and ought not itself directly to exercise all the powers in the various spheres within the jurisdiction of the USSR. Part of them, in conformity with the Constitution, are exercised by other high-standing agencies. Nonetheless, the USSR Supreme Soviet retains the right in these cases, too, to assume supreme control and supreme guidance.

Any amendment to the Constitution is a matter directly for the USSR Supreme Soviet. It also sees that the USSR Constitution is observed and that of each of the republics corresponds to the USSR fundamental law. When it amends or supplements the USSR Constitution it ensures that the highest republican bodies, their Supreme Soviets, also make corresponding adjustments to the constitutions of the republics. This is specified in Article 16 of the USSR Constitution, under which each Union Republic has its own constitution with due account for its national characteristics but formulated in full accord with the USSR Constitution. Similarly, the USSR Constitution states that the legislative power of the USSR is exercised exclusively by the USSR Supreme Soviet. This emanates from the need to strengthen the stability of Soviet laws and Soviet democracy, under which, as Lenin once put it, "...only the elected are entitled to speak in the language of state legislation."<sup>1</sup>

A law is an act of tremendous social significance in that it regulates the most important social relations. Because they embody the tested standards of socialist law and order, Soviet laws are an expression of the popular will and are a reliable safeguard of the socialist social system, the interests and rights of Soviet citizens. They reflect the experience of state, economic, cultural and military development and are intended to strengthen, safeguard and promote relations and order in the Soviet community as it advances towards communism. They are the supreme manifestation of the sovereign will of the Soviet people and contain the most general standards and rules of conduct for the population as a whole; they also establish the fundamental principles of Soviet legislation for different branches of the law. Soviet laws possess supreme juridical authority over all other enactments, promulgated on the basis of laws and in order to concretise their implications.

The Soviet Constitution empowers the USSR Supreme Soviet to lay down the basic principles of land tenure and the utilisation of the forests, mineral resources and waters, the basic principles in education and health, the fundamentals of labour, marriage and family legislation, the basic principles of criminal, civil and procedural legislation and the fundamentals of the judicial system. Union Republics adopt their corresponding codes and laws in accordance with the fundamentals of legislation laid down on a country-wide scale.

No transfer of legislative functions to executive bodies is permitted in the USSR. Such a transfer, or delegation, of legislative duties is indigenous to bourgeois states where executive power is constantly augmented at the expense of parliamentary authority. In the Soviet Union, bills are introduced into the USSR Supreme Soviet by a wide group of bodies and persons who enjoy the right to initiate legislation.

In recent years, the public at large has increasingly had an opportunity to discuss the most important bills before they have come before the Supreme Soviet. Literally millions of people have taken part in these discussions. The practice of conducting a national debate on issues of paramount importance underscores the democratic nature of the Supreme Soviet's legislative functions and is, in fact, becoming an



immanent part of the system. Many of the amendments and proposals put forward by individual citizens and mass organisations have found their way into the final version of the bills.

When the bill becomes law, it is published in the languages of all the Union Republics under the signatures of the Chairman and the Secretary of the USSR Supreme Soviet Presidium. This reflects the complete equality of the republics and makes an all-Union law accessible and understandable to all citizens irrespective of their national allegiance. Soviet laws have equal force everywhere in the Soviet Union and, in the event of divergence between a republican law and an all-Union law, the latter always takes precedence.

The USSR Supreme Soviet ratifies annual and long-term national economic plans, the State Budget and the account of its fulfilment. It possesses these powers because it enjoys material and legal paramountcy; the populace has accorded it authority over the country's material and spiritual wealth, and over the direction of economic and cultural development. That is why the supreme representative body devotes so much attention and time to preparing, discussing and solving issues relating to economic plans and ratification of the State Budget.

The USSR Supreme Soviet sets up higher bodies, appoints higher state officials, and if need be it relieves them of their duties. It elects its own presidium, appoints the Council of Ministers (the Soviet Government), the Procurator-General of the USSR and elects the USSR Supreme Court, and exercises supreme control over their work.

All major domestic and foreign policy issues are debated and resolved in the USSR Supreme Soviet. Further, it is responsible for accepting new republics into the USSR, it ratifies changes to boundaries between Union Republics, establishes the general procedure for mutual relations between Union Republics and foreign states, lays down the guiding principles for the organisation of military units of the republics, and ratifies the formation of new Autonomous Republics and Autonomous regions within constituent republics.

When the need arises, it reforms various state agencies, and modifies their structure and composition. In March 1946, for example, the first session of the second Supreme Soviet

reformed the Council of People's Commissars of the USSR into the USSR Council of Ministers, and the people's commissariats into ministries; it also changed the name of the USSR Procurator into the USSR Procurator-General. In 1957 it amended the USSR Constitution by including Chairmen of the Councils of Ministers of the Union Republics in the USSR Council of Ministers by virtue of their office and by including Chairmen of the Supreme Courts of the Union Republics in the USSR Supreme Court.

In line with economic and cultural changes, the USSR Supreme Soviet sanctions the necessary reorganisation of the national ministries: some are amalgamated, some partitioned, new ones are formed and some downgraded from all-Union to Union-cum-republican status. It sets up state committees of the Council of Ministers for special issues, like building, labour and wages.

In its capacity as the highest state body, the USSR Supreme Soviet is instrumental in directing Soviet foreign policy, in safeguarding peace and easing international tension. Indicative in this respect is the Supreme Soviet's Declaration of February 9, 1955, to all the nations and parliaments of the world, spelling out the basic principles of Soviet peace-abiding foreign policy and proclaiming the possibility and expediency of establishing direct contacts between the USSR Supreme Soviet and foreign parliaments by exchanging parliamentary delegations, enabling parliamentarians of one country to put their views in the parliament of another, promoting friendly relations and co-operation between parliaments, governments and the peoples of different nations irrespective of their socio-economic system. For these purposes the USSR Supreme Soviet created its own parliamentary group which, in 1955, gained entry to the Inter-Parliamentary Union and has since made an energetic contribution to its work.

Soviet Communist Party policy aimed at lasting peace and all-round fortification of Soviet defence is very much in evidence in the actions of the Supreme Soviet. Of late, its foreign policy activity has considerably increased, with regular attention given to government reports and communications on the international situation and Soviet foreign policy, and important decrees and pronouncements being frequently made on key international issues. The Supreme Soviet has

expressed the unanimous desire of Soviet people for lasting peace by giving full support to government proposals for complete and universal disarmament, to the government measures to halt the Soviet testing of nuclear weapons, to make a reduction in the Soviet armed forces, and to establish a collective security system and consolidate international co-operation.

In their discussions of Soviet Government foreign policy, deputies have underlined that since it meets the vital interests of all peace-loving states, including the Soviet Union, it fully warrants the approval of the Soviet people and their delegates to the country's highest legislative body.

The Supreme Soviet consistently stands on guard of peace and international security, strives to further commercial ties between the USSR and other countries and extends effective help to nations fighting for liberation or defending their independence from imperialist encroachments.

#### BI-CAMERAL STRUCTURE OF THE USSR SUPREME SOVIET

The USSR Supreme Soviet has two chambers, one the Soviet of the Union, the other the Soviet of Nationalities. The Soviet bi-cameral system differs essentially from the traditional bourgeois parliamentary division where the two chambers are unequal. The latter normally ignores the interests of national minorities and is structured without any consideration for the country's national composition. The USSR, on the other hand, is the first union state in the history of mankind to have a bi-cameral supreme representative body which fully reflects the multinational composition of its population. This provision is part of the very nature of the Soviet socialist federation which is a voluntary association of equal and sovereign nation-states or Union Republics. In 1922, the independent Soviet republics voluntarily signed a treaty which formed the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics.

The Declaration and Treaty on the formation of the USSR, adopted at the First All-Union Congress of Soviets, both emphasised that only in the country of Soviets, only under a proletarian dictatorship with majority backing, was it possible to root out national oppression, create an aura of

mutual trust and lay the basis for fraternal co-operation between nationalities. The Treaty, however, said nothing of the Central Executive Committee having two chambers; it merely established that the Congress of Soviets, its elected Central Executive Committee and the latter's Presidium would constitute the country's highest state body. It was somewhat later, when the 1924 Constitution was being drafted, that the Party put forward and theoretically substantiated the idea of turning the Central Executive Committee into a bi-cameral body that would function in between congresses of the Soviets. Thus, the resolution on the national question approved by the 12th Communist Party Congress in 1923 stated that since the USSR was a new form of cohabitation of different nationalities, a new form of their co-operation in a single union state within whose bounds all evil vestiges of the past should be overcome, the country's supreme bodies should be shaped so that they completely embodied both the common needs and requirements of all nationalities, and the specific needs and requirements of the various nationalities.

"Therefore," the resolution ran, "a special organ representing nationalities on an equal basis should exist side by side with the existing central bodies which represent all the working people in the country, irrespective of nationality."

The 12th Party Congress recommended the setting up of a special body representing all national republics and national regions equally, with due account for representation of all nationalities within these republics. That utterly novel and vitally important decision had enormous significance in bolstering the friendship and co-operation of all Soviet nationalities. Shortly after, the name and composition of the body were finalised and its electoral procedure elaborated.

The 4th conference of the Central Committee of the Russian Communist Party (Bolsheviks) met in June 1923 with the participation of officials from the various national republics and regions to discuss practical ways of implementing the national question resolution of the 12th Congress. Specifically, it examined the practical measures that involved the institution of a second chamber in the Central Executive Committee of the USSR. The bi-cameral system gained legislative status with the adoption of the USSR Constitution in 1924, by which the Central Executive Committee was to comprise a Soviet of the Union and a Soviet of



Nationalities. The former was to be elected by a Congress of Soviets from representatives of Union Republics in proportion to each republic's population, and was to consist of 414 members. The Soviet of Nationalities was to consist of representatives of Union and Autonomous Republics (5 members from each) and representatives of Autonomous regions (1 member from each); the Congress of Soviets was to ratify its composition. The Constitution also defined the functions of both chambers and the procedure for settling disputes between them.

The need to create two chambers still held good. Quite evidently, this depended upon the type of tasks facing the Soviet federation in ensuring the fraternal co-operation of all Soviet nationalities within the bounds of a single union state. Hence the need for the 1936 Constitution to abide by the 1924 constitutional principles in retaining the bi-cameral body. The USSR Supreme Soviet, therefore, consists of two chambers: the Soviet of the Union and the Soviet of Nationalities.

Both chambers are elected by Soviet citizens simultaneously. The Soviet of the Union is elected on the basis of 1 deputy for 300,000 electors; the Soviet of Nationalities, however, is elected by Union and Autonomous Republics, Autonomous regions and National areas. The Constitution specifies the exact representation from each of these administrative units.

The Soviet of Nationalities guarantees representation of every nation or nationality no matter how small. That does not mean that the deputy chosen by a particular republic, Autonomous region and National area has to be from an indigenous republican, regional or area ethnic group.

Each chamber is an expression of the common goals and interests of the Soviet people dedicated to building a communist community. At the same time, the Soviet of Nationalities, by virtue of the peculiarities of its make-up and electoral procedure, makes it possible fully to consider the specific demands and requirements of the Union Republics and Autonomous Republics and regions.

Within socialist society the nation's common interests merge with the specific interests of various nationalities; they are not in conflict. It is nevertheless very important to take into account correctly and opportunely both overall

requirements and specific ethnic demands and conditions, when dealing with major economic and cultural issues. Hence the purpose of the bi-cameral structure of the USSR Supreme Soviet reflecting the multi-national character of the Soviet Union.

While it is true that the 1936 Constitution persisted with the bi-cameral system, it also introduced several amendments to it. Up to 1936 the Congress of Soviets had been the supreme state authority, with the bi-cameral Central Executive Committee functioning between congresses. After 1936, however, all state power was vested in the USSR Supreme Soviet which became the only supreme representative institution in the USSR. Today, therefore, the bi-cameral system is inherent in the highest body of authority. By the 1924 Constitution, the Congress of Soviets had not chosen, it had only approved, members of the Soviet of Nationalities, and therefore there existed a certain divergence in the method of forming the chambers. Something similar was proposed in the 1936 draft Constitution when it was presented for nation-wide discussion. Article 35 of the draft pronounced that the population would not elect the Soviet of Nationalities, its deputies would be nominated by the Supreme Soviets of Union and Autonomous Republics and by Soviets of Autonomous regions, in the proportion of ten deputies to each Union Republic, five deputies to each Autonomous Republic and two deputies to each Autonomous region.

During the public debate on the draft, however, this article provoked numerous amendments for securing equal rights for both chambers in the method of their formation.

In the Constitution's final version, as adopted by the Extraordinary 8th Congress of Soviets, Article 35 stated that both chambers should be elected on the basis of universal, equal and direct suffrage by a secret ballot; it also established more complete and differentiated representation from republics and nation-state formations and included, for the first time, direct representation from National areas which covered the numerically small nationalities of the Soviet Far North.

The 1936 Constitution laid down the following representation to the Soviet of Nationalities: 25 deputies from each Union Republic, 11 deputies from each Autonomous Republic, 5 deputies from each Autonomous region and 1 deputy from each National area. These proportions ensured roughly the

same size for both chambers. However, with the considerable natural increase in population, the number of deputies to the Soviet of the Union has steadily grown, as the table below indicates.

Convocation of USSR Supreme Soviet	Number of Deputies to Soviet of the Union	Number of Deputies to Soviet of Nationalities
1 st Convocation	569	574
2nd "	682	657
3rd "	678	638
4th "	708	639
5th "	738	640
6th "	791	652

With the constantly increasing population, the Soviet of the Union has considerably outgrown the second chamber. Consequently, an amendment was made to the Constitution in 1966 to remove the numerical inequality between them and broaden the representation of the Union Republics in the Soviet of Nationalities. The new rule permitted 32 instead of 25 deputies to be elected for each Union Republic. As a result, the Soviet of the Union had 767 deputies and the Soviet of Nationalities 750 at the 1966 and the 1970 elections, thus bringing both chambers more into line.

At the present time representation in the Soviet of Nationalities is as follows:

- 480 deputies from Union Republics,
- 220 deputies from Autonomous Republics,
- 40 deputies from Autonomous regions,
- 10 deputies from National areas.

Both chambers have identical powers. The Constitution requires both chambers to meet for an identical period, sessions to run concurrently, both chambers to have the right to initiate legislation, all questions within the competence of the USSR Supreme Soviet to be debated equally at sessions of both chambers, them both to vote for ratification of laws and other Supreme Soviet enactments, them to share common standing orders, each chamber to elect its own standing committees and choose its own internal leading and auxiliary bodies (chairmen and vice-chairmen, standing committees,

and so on), the chairmen or vice-chairmen of the respective chambers to take turns in chairing joint sessions, and a genuine democratic procedure to settle any disputes that may arise between the two chambers.

The last point is particularly important, since it is not merely a question of the equal status of both chambers, it is one of the cardinal juridical guarantees of this equality.

Under the 1924 Constitution, in the event of a deadlock between the two chambers of the CEC, the bone of contention would be settled by means of a conciliation commission to the mutual satisfaction of both chambers. The Constitution further provided for a joint session of both chambers in the event of a deadlock between the two chambers which could not be settled by means of the conciliation commission. Finally, if no absolute majority from the Soviet of the Union or the Soviet of Nationalities could be attained, the matter would be handed over to the current or extraordinary Congress of Soviets, at the demand of one of the chambers.

But no such stalemate ever occurred. Indeed, it was hard to imagine it occurring in a socialist state with its absence of class and national antagonisms. All the same, given complete bi-cameral equality in legal terms, the most proper means of resolving any differences was to hand over the issue for the people or their most representative body to decide. Such a body before the 1936 Constitution was the Congress of Soviets.

The 1936 Constitution, too, upholds the procedure for settling inter-chamber differences. The first part of Article 47, providing for the establishment of an equally weighted conciliation commission and a second examination of the issue in both chambers, is identical to the procedure laid down in the previous Constitution. The second part, however, provides for a new method of resolving differences between the two chambers—dissolution of the Supreme Soviet and the appointment of new elections. Yet, in practice, Article 47 has never been invoked simply because the Soviet community is politically, socially and morally united. Nonetheless, the constitutional provision serves as a juridical guarantee of the equal rights of both chambers and is consistent with the democratic principles of the Soviet state system.

The bi-cameral structure of the Soviet parliament fully justifies itself in practice, in the day-to-day multifaceted



activity of the USSR Supreme Soviet. In the joint sessional debates, deputies to the Soviet of Nationalities are extremely circumspect in their approach to the various economic, state and cultural problems of the nationalities.

Anna Nutetegryne, deputy for the Chukotka National Area in the Soviet Far North, speaking at a session of the USSR Supreme Soviet, had this to say: "Chukotka conjures up an image of polar bears, reindeer and other exotica in the minds of some people. We certainly do have polar bears and reindeer. Moreover, reindeer are greatly revered, but not as exotic beasts, rather as the basis of our economy. During the years of Soviet government we have done extremely well out of reindeer breeding." The deputy went on to voice her pride in Chukotka and talk in detail about its industrial and cultural progress. She pointed out the need to build new ports and to equip the Chukotka airlines with multi-seater helicopters and other machines. As a result, the USSR Supreme Soviet adopted her proposals.

No less attention is paid to the interests of all other Soviet nationalities. Numerous proposals flow in to the Soviet of Nationalities and its standing committees from republics, Autonomous regions and National areas; they are all studied carefully, the necessary steps taken and means sought for implementing them as rapidly as possible.

The bi-cameral system of the USSR Supreme Soviet, being profoundly democratic both by its very nature and functioning, is one of the major attainments of Soviet state theory and practice. It ensures the implementation of the Leninist national policy, the strengthening of friendship and solidarity of all peoples inhabiting the Soviet Union. The USSR Supreme Soviet is, in fact, the world's first supreme state body to guarantee equal rights, broad national representation, and careful consideration of the specific needs and requirements of the various nationalities whenever general state decisions are taken.

#### SESSIONS OF THE USSR SUPREME SOVIET

Sessions are held in the conference hall of the Grand Kremlin Palace. On the opening day of a session deputies file into the hall and the chamber chairman and vice-chairmen take their seats at the Presidium table. The side boxes

are occupied by members of the USSR Supreme Soviet Presidium and honoured guests from abroad. At the appointed time the chairman notifies deputies and guests that the Soviet Parliament is in session. The agenda is announced and standing orders for the session are confirmed. With that, the deputies begin discussing and dealing with the important business concerning Soviet home and foreign policy. This is the normal procedure for the USSR Supreme Soviet's opening session. The session is one of the principal forms of its activities.

Soviet deputies, as mentioned above, fulfil their duties without terminating their normal occupation. For that reason sessions of the Soviets, including that of the USSR Supreme Soviet, are convened periodically. In accordance with the Constitution, it is the duty of the USSR Supreme Soviet Presidium to convene sessions of the Supreme Soviet at least twice a year. If need be, the Presidium may call an extraordinary session; it is also obliged to do so on the demand of any Union Republic.

The Presidium usually publishes the ordinance on convening a session 20-30 days before it is due to take place. Since the Presidium conducts business between sessions, it summarises all the proposals it has received and presents them for deputies to decide whether to include them in the agenda. Sessions may either be separate or joint. As a rule, the Soviet of the Union and the Soviet of Nationalities hold their meetings separately, but for certain business they come together. The Constitution requires them to meet jointly to elect the USSR Supreme Soviet Presidium and to form the USSR Council of Ministers (the Soviet Government). Joint meetings may also take place by decision of the houses, particularly to hear a report on some point in the agenda that has to be examined by both houses. Examples of this practice, i.e., when reports are heard in joint meetings and discussed separately, are the examination of the State Economic Plan and the State Budget. If deputies of both houses consider it necessary, debates, too, may be held in joint session.

The Chairman of the respective house presides over each meeting, or he may designate one of his four vice-chairmen to do the job. For joint meetings, the two chairmen take turns in the chair. One of the senior chamber deputies opens

the initial session of a new convocation in each chamber and remains in the chair until a new chairman is elected. Chairmen and vice-chairmen are elected from the body of deputies of their respective chambers at the first meeting of each chamber.

The agenda for each session is confirmed at chamber meetings. Normally, the chairman reads out the questions that have been put forward for the Supreme Soviet's examination at the given session. Deputies then have an opportunity to make their remarks and suggestions in regard to the agenda, as they have in debate on any issue. After consideration of the opinions of deputies, the agenda is then put to the vote. After its acceptance, by both chambers, the deputies then agree on the order of business. At this point a clear distinction is made between deliberations that require a joint sitting and business that can be handled separately.

The Supreme Soviet Presidium and Chairmen of the two houses have a big hand in drawing up proposals on order of business and on the agenda. Proposals on these issues are presented for preliminary discussion to the Councils of Elders in each chamber.

The main job of the Councils of Elders is to agree on what questions have to be included in the agenda, on the sessional order for discussion of these questions, and on the composition of the bodies elected by the Supreme Soviet and its chambers.

The Councils of Elders are set up in both chambers at the start of each new convocation. That in the Soviet of the Union comprises representatives of groups of deputies elected from each region. One representative is usually chosen from each group of deputies to join the Council of Elders. Where the group exceeds ten deputies, two representatives are put forward, and if it has more than 20 deputies, three are nominated.

The Council of Elders of the Soviet of Nationalities consists of representatives of groups of deputies elected from each Union Republic (6 members), each Autonomous Republic (2 members), each Autonomous region (1 member) and of deputies elected to the Soviet of Nationalities from National areas.

Both councils include men and women from all walks of life—industrial workers, collective farmers, Party and non-

Party members, government and trade union officials, scientists, writers, doctors and teachers. Nearly 20 per cent do not belong to the Communist Party.

The preliminary discussion held in the Councils of Elders concerning arrangements of the sessional work enables them to prepare and lay before the chambers proposals on the various issues with due account for the opinion of a large number of deputies. Sessional examination of an agenda item begins with hearing a report, usually made by a representative of the body which brought the matter up for discussion. The report may validate the main points of a bill or may scrutinise any proposals brought up for discussion, or it may describe some aspect of the work of a body subordinate to the Supreme Soviet if its work is under discussion. Co-rapporteurs may also take the floor in both chambers. Co-reports are usually made by standing committees which have been instructed by the chambers or, between sessions, by the USSR Supreme Soviet Presidium, to make a preliminary examination of a bill or whatever question has been put before the Supreme Soviet. Any group of deputies, though no fewer than 50, also has the right to nominate a co-rapporteur.

The standing committee uses the co-report to voice its opinion on the question under discussion and put forward its own proposals. The preliminary examination of bills and other documents by the committee and the presentation of its conclusions to both chambers in no way inhibit the initiative of deputies in their debate; they in fact facilitate a thorough-going and comprehensive examination of agenda items and the taking of the most appropriate decisions.

The standing committee's co-report is the culmination of lengthy collective work of a large group of deputies. As a result of discussions and searches for the best solutions that befit the given circumstances the committee puts before the respective chamber its own amendments, proposals or remarks.

All sessional work is done on an extensive collective basis and issues are debated in a business-like atmosphere. Deputies from all parts of the country and all walks of life put forward their views on the reports and co-reports. The deputies are well-equipped to give an authoritative opinion



because they cover a wide range of backgrounds—heads of Union, republican and local Party and government agencies, representatives of mass organisations, managers of factories, industrial and agricultural experts, factory workers, farmers, teachers, doctors, scientists and cultural workers.

All sessions are conspicuously lively in their discussion of items on the agenda. This is particularly encouraged by the Presidium's practice of informing deputies of the questions it suggests for inclusion in the list of discussion items. Because they are well acquainted with local affairs and know the opinion of their constituents, deputies are in a position to make specific proposals and be critical of the work of local and central institutions and organisations. Debates are terminated only at the bidding of the deputies themselves.

All the proposals and remarks made by deputies during sessions are taken into consideration when the final decisions of the USSR Supreme Soviet are taken. The deputies themselves decide how their amendments, proposals and remarks should best be incorporated into the bills. In certain cases, the preparation of proposals for specific changes to the text of a bill or any other enactment may be entrusted to an *ad hoc* committee.

Decisions are taken after the debate and summing-up speeches made by a rapporteur and a co-rapporteur. Each chamber votes separately on bills in accordance with the constitutional requirements. Laws and other Supreme Soviet enactments are adopted by a simple majority vote in each chamber. In the case of a constitutional amendment the Constitution requires a two-thirds majority vote in both chambers.

The initial session of the USSR Supreme Soviet of each convocation differs somewhat from other sessions in that it must first deal with certain questions affecting the normal course of work of the Supreme Soviet. Its functions are to elect the chairmen and vice-chairmen of both chambers, to elect the Credentials Committees for both chambers and hear their reports on election results to the USSR Supreme Soviet and results of a verification of the credentials of the elected deputies.

Another task for the first session is to include the formation of standing committees in the agenda of each chamber.

This does not mean, however, that no further decision can be taken at future sessions on changing the composition of the committees or on forming a new standing committee. Further, the Constitution requires that the first session elects at a joint meeting the Presidium of the USSR Supreme Soviet and appoints the Council of Ministers of the USSR. Each deputy has the right to voice his opinion on the nominees for the office, to reject a candidate and propose other candidates. The deputies also decide the voting procedure: it can be for each nominee individually, for the personnel of the body to be elected as a whole, or in some other way which the deputies deem expedient.

All meetings of the Supreme Soviet are open to the public and are regularly reported in the press. When it is in session, daily press accounts give reports and speeches of deputies on issues being debated and decisions taken. At the end of the session, a verbatim report is published in the languages of all Union Republics.

#### THE STANDING COMMITTEE SYSTEM

Sessions of the USSR Supreme Soviet are comparatively short. Judging by the news features on television or at the cinema it would appear that all the deputies do is to vote in favour of all motions, that the Soviet is a "rubber stamp" for laws and other enactments, that there are no disputes, no lengthy and complicated and meticulous preparatory work. In fact, things are much more complex than they would seem at first glance. The fact that a particular issue has a smooth passage through the house and evokes unanimous approval is largely thanks to the work of the standing committees where the issue is initially discussed and prepared comprehensively before it is presented to the session. Doubts or objections raised by any one deputy entail a further search for material, travel to the relevant locality and another long, hard look at the matter under review. The rooms where the standing committees meet are rarely empty. This is where the work is done, where the disputes arise and are thrashed out. You are quite likely to find at the same table a schoolmaster and a Party official, a milkmaid and a minister, a composer and the president of

the Academy of Sciences. They are all deputies to the USSR Supreme Soviet and all members of standing committees. Members of mass organisations, scientists and other specialists also take part in these discussions. It may be a special meeting at which just a handful of people are present, or it may be a widely representative meeting to which experts are called in to help arrive at the correct decision.

The standing committees, together with the Presidium described below, ensure effective and continuous work in the Supreme Soviet and thereby create all the necessary prerequisites for a thorough discussion and correct decision-making on all issues that are put before the highest representative state body.

In recent years, the work of the standing committees has noticeably increased and with it their number. Prior to 1957, for example, each chamber operated only four standing committees (Credentials, Legislative Proposals, Budget, and Foreign Affairs). The Soviet of Nationalities began to operate an Economic Committee from 1957. But in August 1966 the first session of the seventh Supreme Soviet adopted a decision to increase the number of standing committees and organise them in line with the major economic, administrative, social and cultural spheres, and with certain aspects of Supreme Soviet work.

On October 12, 1967, the USSR Supreme Soviet adopted a special Statute on Standing Committees of the Soviet of the Union and the Soviet of Nationalities, which specified their electoral procedure, their main functions, the organisation of their activities and their relations with the leading bodies of the chambers and with the Presidium.

In December 1968, additional standing committees on youth affairs were set up at the fifth USSR Supreme Session in each of its chambers. Currently each chamber has 13 standing committees. The 26 standing committees of the two chambers altogether contain 912 deputies, or two-thirds of all Supreme Soviet deputies. They include people of all walks of life and different nationalities of the country.

The standing committees are the constantly functioning auxiliary and preparatory bodies of the chambers. They consist of deputies who are normally elected to their posts at the first sessions of both chambers of each convocation

and operate for the whole life-span of the Supreme Soviet, i.e., four years.\*

Depending on their work schedule, committee members make a daily study of the state of affairs in various economic and cultural spheres, keep abreast of the situation in their constituencies and in the country as a whole, and then discuss in detail all the material they have gathered at committee meetings with the participation of representatives of the ministries and departments concerned. All their work is done on a collegial basis in open committee and attracts other deputies, members of Party, trade union, Komsomol and other organisations, and representatives of ministries, departments and research institutions.

According to the nature of its activity, each committee prepares its conclusions on issues put before the Supreme Soviet or may, on its own initiative, draw up bills and study other questions concerned with Supreme Soviet business. Its most important function is to control the activities of ministries, departments and other executive bodies. Wherever necessary, it will listen to reports on various items by the Chairman of the USSR Council of Ministers, the chairmen of the Councils of Ministers of the Union Republics and ministerial and departmental heads. All standing committees are responsible to their respective chamber and accountable to it; their work is co-ordinated by the Supreme Soviet Presidium.

#### LEGISLATIVE PROPOSALS COMMITTEES

The Legislative Proposals Committees of the Soviet of the Union and of the Soviet of Nationalities do a great deal of work in drafting new legislation and amending existing legislation. They make a preliminary examination of all bills presented for approval to the USSR Supreme Soviet and they make their conclusions on them. They also put forward bills on their own initiative. As a rule, they present their conclusions to the chambers on all bills except

\* Apart from the standing committees set up by both chambers, the Supreme Soviet may establish interim committees for various purposes which only last as long as their commission. They include committees for drafting various bills, and editorial committees. The Soviet Constitution requires that the Supreme Soviet appoint, whenever it thinks necessary, enquiry and auditing commissions.



those that fall within the competence of other standing committees.

The committees do in fact initiate legislation by putting forward to the Supreme Soviet drafts of all-Union legislative acts. Both chambers or the Presidium can also instruct these committees to draft a new law.

A number of major laws have of late come from the Legislative Proposals Committees. The USSR Supreme Soviet ratified the following laws drawn up by the Committees: the Law on Budgetary Powers of the USSR and the Union Republics, the Law on Procedure of Recalling a USSR Supreme Soviet Deputy, the Fundamentals of Legislation on the Judicial System of the USSR, the Union and Autonomous Republics, and also the fundamentals of legislation of the USSR and the Union Republics for several branches of Soviet law.

The Committees function with broad public participation. In preparing its conclusions on bills presented to the Supreme Soviet and in law-making, the Committees constantly rely on members of mass organisations, scientists and experts on the spot.

Sub-committees are set up when a particular bill requires intensive and extensive study. They include in their membership both committee members and other USSR Supreme Soviet deputies, republican Supreme Soviet deputies, local Soviet deputies and members of mass organisations, ministries and departments; they also call upon informed and specialist opinion. A member of the Legislative Proposals Committee normally heads the sub-committee, and its personnel are approved by the committees.

When it drafts bills, the Committee carefully considers existing legislation and the work of state and economic bodies and mass organisations. It, therefore, operates in close contact with the USSR Supreme Court, the Soviet Procurator's Office, the Juridical Commission of the USSR Council of Ministers, the All-Union Trade Union Council and the Komsomol Central Committee, and with ministries and departments whose activities are associated with the bills drafted by the Committee.

At the Committee's bidding, members of the sub-committees, scientists and specialists regularly take trips into the republics to discuss bills with officials of local bodies, repre-

sentatives of republican ministries and departments, academic institutions, and with members of the public. Thousands of people actually take part in these discussions and all the records of their discussions, their remarks and proposals are examined by the sub-committees and taken into consideration when the draft law is prepared.

A further feature of the work of the Committee is that it is conducted in full view of the public. The press publishes communiques on its work, and members of the Committee write in the papers and speak on radio and television about legislation under review. The press also features the drafts of major laws before their adoption by the Supreme Soviet, and this further ensures wide popular discussion of all major bills. Proposals made by the public receive substantial attention when the Committee prepares legislation. During discussions on the draft Law on State Pensions, for example, the Committees examined more than 12,000 letters from the public. Committees also read several thousand letters when the draft Fundamentals of Civil Legislation and the Fundamentals of Civil Procedure were under public discussion. Furthermore, many of the public's proposals were incorporated in the draft Fundamentals ratified by the Supreme Soviet. Over seven thousand proposals came from the public on the draft Fundamentals of Legislation on Marriage and the Family of the USSR and the Union Republics. A further 8,000 letters arrived on the newsdesk of the paper *Izvestia*, and many more went to other newspapers and magazines.

All letters from the public are examined by the Legislative Proposals Committees when they are working on the legislation. This consideration for the public's proposals enables new points to be incorporated into the draft texts, thereby substantially improving them.

#### PLANNING AND BUDGET COMMITTEES

Planning and Budget Committees, with 51 members, were formed for each chamber at the initial session of the seventh USSR Supreme Soviet in 1966. They include deputies from all the Union and a majority of the Autonomous Republics, and officials of various economic and cultural, Party, government and trade union organisations. Their job is to make a preliminary study of the draft long-term

and annual economic plans and the draft state budget presented by the government to the USSR Supreme Soviet.

When they scrutinise the draft plan and budget for the coming year, the Planning and Budget Committees exercise control over the fulfilment of the Supreme Soviet-endorsed plan and budget for the current year.

Every year they examine the government's reports on the State Budget, thereby exercising control over the receipt of revenue and utilisation of budgetary resources and over budgetary and fiscal discipline.

When they study the draft economic plan and the State Budget, the Planning and Budget Committees look for additional means of boosting production, pay particular attention to revealing and making better use of internal reserves in all economic spheres, improving quality and reducing costs of production, increasing State Budget accumulations and revenue, and ensuring a more rational and economical utilisation of budgetary resources. They begin their examination of the draft economic plan and the State Budget for the coming year, and their report on the previous year's budget, two to three months before the Supreme Soviet session at which the reports are to be presented. Their work commences by hearing reports from the chairman of the State Planning Committee and the Finance Minister who explain the draft plan, the new budget and the report on the old budget; they also provide detailed information on the implementation of the Committees' proposals and recommendations on the current year's plan and budget. The next step is for the Committees to examine the two drafts and the report in detail with the respective branch committees. Joint preparatory committees for the main sections of the plan and the budget are set up for that purpose, and they are joined by special committees for examining the draft plans and budget of the Union Republics.

Once it has completed its study, each Planning and Budget Committee presents its conclusions to the appropriate chamber. These conclusions, made available to all deputies of the Supreme Soviet, cover an evaluation of the draft plan, budget and report, the committee's proposed amendments to the draft plan and budget, and its critical remarks on the work of ministries, departments, planning and financial bodies.

The Supreme Soviet approves the plan and budget, incorporating the committees' amendments. Laws on the plan and budget are published for general information. Then the Supreme Soviet instructs the Council of Ministers to study the proposals and remarks concerning the draft economic plan and State Budget contained in the conclusions of the Planning and Budget Committees of each chamber and in the stated views of the deputies, and to take necessary steps to have them implemented.

The Committees are further empowered to draw up bills and other proposals on economic planning, budgetary and financial questions to be put before the Supreme Soviet and its Presidium, and to prepare conclusions on items handed to the committees for preliminary survey.

Besides their accredited members, the Planning and Budget Committees and their sub-committees involve in their work other deputies, representatives of the Councils of Ministers of the Union Republics, ministries and departments, and specialists and consultants.

#### FOREIGN AFFAIRS COMMITTEES

The Standing Committees on Foreign Affairs of the Soviet of the Union and the Soviet of Nationalities examine outstanding international issues, present the chambers or Presidium with their findings on foreign policy matters and on the ratification, denunciation or abrogation of treaties and agreements between the Soviet Union and foreign powers, and their conclusions on draft legislation in foreign relations. They also enjoy the right to prepare and recommend on their own initiative draft laws and other legislation on foreign policy matters.

At their meetings they hear reports by the Soviet Foreign Minister, members of the Government and the Foreign Affairs Ministry, and representatives of other ministries and departments on the state of relations between the Soviet Union and foreign nations, on the implementation of foreign technical aid agreements, on foreign trade relations and the implementation of trade treaties and agreements.

Guided by Leninist principles of Soviet foreign policy and by the need to strengthen peace, the Foreign Affairs Committees prepared and put before the USSR Supreme Soviet several major documents as, for example, the draft



resolutions on the Soviet unilateral halt to atomic and hydrogen weapon testing (1958), resolutions on the report of the Council of Ministers' Chairman on the international situation and Soviet foreign policy (1959), the Supreme Soviet Appeal to the World Parliaments and Governments (1959) in which the Supreme Soviet called upon them to concentrate their efforts on attaining universal and complete disarmament, easing international tension and staving off the threat of a new world war.

The 1955 Declaration "On the Exchange of Delegations Between the USSR Supreme Soviet and Foreign Parliaments" was drawn up by the Committees and marked an important advance in improving inter-parliamentary relations. It gave a big boost to inter-parliamentary exchanges.

Following the adoption by the Supreme Soviet of the Law On a New Substantial Reduction in the Soviet Armed Forces in January 1960, the Committees proposed the adoption of another Supreme Soviet Appeal to the parliaments and governments of the world, in which it urged them to follow the Soviet example.

Further, the Committees have examined many international treaties and agreements and presented their findings on them to the Supreme Soviet Presidium. All this shows that they take an active and regular part in the diverse foreign policy activity of the USSR Supreme Soviet.

#### YOUTH COMMITTEES

The formation in December 1968 of the Youth Standing Committees in both chambers of the USSR Supreme Soviet was prompted by the new important tasks facing the nation in bringing up the younger generation in a communist spirit.

These committees have extended the means available to the Supreme Soviet in tackling questions bearing upon the life of Soviet youth, enabling the Parliament to take more fully into account the needs in educating the younger generation; this is accomplished in the process of drafting bills and solving other problems of political, economic, social and cultural development.

Each committee is made up of a panel of 31 deputies. They include prominent Party functionaries and public figures, writers, scientists, young workers and farmers, and representatives of the Komsomol.

The committees' terms of reference are very broad. They review pending bills and proposals relating to youth, with the increasing involvement of young people in the administration of the state, and with the exercise of control over the observance of legislation that guarantees their rights and interests.

To this end the committees conduct a preliminary review of bills and other enactments affecting the rights of youth and draw up their conclusions. Before the Supreme Soviet of the USSR or its Presidium is to pass an enactment dealing with the education and vocational training, the working and living conditions of youth, their recreation and health protection, their participation in government, economic and social and cultural development, it is to be discussed by the Youth Committees, which then draw up their own conclusions. The committees also take part in the preliminary review of drafts of state economic plans, the state budget and the reports on its execution. As distinct from the Planning and Budgetary Committees which review the submitted drafts from all angles, and from the branch committees which analyse only those sections of the drafts which come under their terms of reference, the Youth Committees focus their attention on matters connected with the education, training, living and working conditions, recreation and health protection of the youth.

In the process of discussing the education of the rising generation the Youth Committees introduce proposals and make recommendations which are of importance to government and non-government organisations. Much attention is paid to the involvement of youth in government. These committees hold special discussions on ways and means for the youth to participate in the activities of the Soviets.

Having heard the report on the work of the Soviets in Georgia and Orenburg Region, and also having considered the materials gathered by committee members in other republics, regions, districts and towns, the committees recommended that all local Soviets draw ever more young people into participation in economic, social and cultural affairs, that they submit for their consideration at Soviet sessions and Executive Committee meetings and standing committees questions on the communist education and vocational train-

ing of youth, on their working and living conditions and recreation.

The committees devote much time to controlling the observance of Soviet legislation. To this end, they organise checks and hear reports by USSR Ministers and heads of central departments on the observance of the laws protecting the rights of youth. For instance, in February 1970, at a joint meeting of the Youth Committees of the two houses of the Soviet Parliament, the reports made by the USSR Ministries of Agriculture, Public Education, and Culture, and the State Committee of the USSR Council of Ministers on Vocational and Technical Training were discussed, as was their work in improving the general educational, technical and cultural level of the rural youth and their engagement in agricultural production. The committees subjected to detailed criticism the shortcomings in the work of these bodies and the discrepancies in their work. The managers of some farms were found to pay little attention to the need of creating for young farmers the necessary living, working and cultural conditions; they did not always observe the requirements of Soviet legislation concerning the labour of young people. The committees emphasised the need for improving the training of agricultural personnel within the system of vocational and technical education. They made detailed recommendations to secure the undeviating observance of Soviet laws which concern the labour and rest of young people.

In addition to participating in the work of the committees and their subcommittees, the committee members devote a great deal of their time to their constituencies and the place of work. In studying the requirements of youth, in drawing up various proposals and putting them into practice, the committees rely on the public at large, first and foremost, and on the YCL activists.

#### CREDENTIALS COMMITTEES

The initial sessions of the USSR Supreme Soviet of each convocation elects Credentials Committees for each chamber to check the eligibility of each deputy. On their recommendation, each chamber decides whether to recognise the credentials or to annul the election of individual deputies. In practice, however, there has never been a case of them

not accepting credentials. This procedure is undertaken at the first session, but in the event of by-elections occurring during the life of the Supreme Soviet (due to a deputy's death or recall or any other circumstance), the question of the new member's credentials is again raised by the Credentials Committees and dealt with by the respective chambers.

Another of their jobs is to check up election returns from each electoral district, handed them by the Central Electoral Commission (or by district electoral commissions in the case of elections in individual constituencies). They also decide whether the electoral commissions or state bodies have committed any infringement of the Soviet Constitution or electoral law in the election of any deputy.

The Committees present to both chambers at the first session of the USSR Supreme Soviet of each convocation information on the composition of deputies, their social status, Party affiliation, nationality, occupation, education, sex and age.

#### SECTORAL STANDING COMMITTEES

Due to rapid and constantly changing economic development, increasing material and cultural public requirements, the appearance of modern industrial sectors and scientific achievements, the supreme body of state authority has had to adapt itself to the more profound and specific solution of economic, cultural and welfare matters. Accordingly, the chambers of the eighth USSR Supreme Soviet set up the following eight sectoral committees: Industry; Transport and Communications; Construction and Industrial Building Materials; Agriculture; Health and Social Security; Education, Science and Culture; Trade, Consumer and Communal Services, and Conservation of Nature. This measure brought the number of deputies involved in these new committees to 552.

The formation of branch committees made possible a more detailed preliminary survey of economic and cultural matters. It also brought a considerable number of deputies employed in industry, agriculture and various social and cultural fields, into the new committees. They are therefore able to call on substantial informed opinion in studying the condition and prospects for development of the



economic and cultural sectors on a nation-wide and republican scale. They are further able to analyse in some detail the work of respective ministries and pinpoint causes of shortcomings in their activity. They also exercise control over the implementation of economic, social and cultural legislation passed by the Supreme Soviet.

The branch standing committees also collaborate with the Legislative Proposals Committees in drafting laws and resolutions relevant to their own field of interest. Their co-operation with the Planning and Budget Committees in examining the economic plan and the budget is particularly valuable. To these ends, each chamber creates joint preparatory commissions of members from branch committees and the Planning and Budget Committees. The branch committees regularly check on the implementation of laws on the economic plan and State Budget, and see that the committees' appropriate budgetary and economic plan proposals are carried out.

In recent years the standing committees have attracted many specialists and officials from central and local organisations to help them examine a large number of important questions affecting economic progress and improve social services.

The committees drew their attention to the need of eliminating various shortcomings in the work of economic, cultural and educational organisations, delegating concrete tasks to the respective Ministries and departments involved, for the further development of the country's economic and cultural life. Committee meetings are attended by responsible workers from the CC CPSU, the Presidium of the USSR Supreme Soviet, the Ministries and departments, by representatives of the mass media. Committee recommendations are brought to public notice through the press.

#### PRESIDIUM OF THE USSR SUPREME SOVIET

The Soviet system of representation includes a permanent body that can operate between sessions of the USSR Supreme Soviet and thus uphold the continuity of state administration by settling urgent matters, controlling the activity of bodies accountable to the Supreme Soviet, and carrying out other

important functions. This body is the Presidium of the USSR Supreme Soviet.

Its work is based on such democratic principles, as the Presidium's election by the USSR Supreme Soviet, its collective character, the absence of any powers that might counterpose it to the highest representative body to which it is fully responsible and accountable in all its activity.

The Presidium is elected at a joint sitting of both chambers of the Supreme Soviet, and its members consist of a President, fifteen Vice-Presidents, a Secretary and twenty ordinary members. Since the number is reasonably small, it is always possible to gather them for a meeting and, even more important, to discuss matters in a businesslike way and take the decisions required. By tradition, its members do not include any government or standing committee members or chairmen and vice-chairmen of the chambers. This is done so that Presidium members are not bound by any commitments to other bodies and can objectively examine and settle matters within their jurisdiction. Others barred from office are the chairman and members of the USSR Supreme Court and the Procurator-General inasmuch as they are accountable to the Presidium and the Supreme Soviet.

Membership thus comprises public and state officials and deputies from the factories and farms, cultural institutions and the armed forces. The President is currently Nikolai Podgorny, a top-rank Party leader and Politburo member. Among the members elected at the 1970 Supreme Soviet session were: V. I. Bolshukhin, senior foreman at the Central Urals Copper Plant, Z. P. Pukhova, a weaver at the Ivanovo Spinning and Weaving Mill, V. M. Kavun and G. A. Orlova, collective farm chairmen, S. M. Budyonny, Marshal of the Soviet Union, I. G. Petrovsky, Rector of Moscow University, and the writer L. S. Sobolev. Membership includes elder participants of the revolutionary movement side by side with young people born under socialism.

All fifteen Union Republics have their representatives on the Presidium, one from each republic and, by tradition, the Supreme Soviet elects as vice-presidents of the USSR Supreme Soviet Presidium the presidents of the Supreme Soviet Presidiums of the Union Republics.

The Presidium of the Supreme Soviet is therefore quite capable of exercising all the responsibilities of the higher

state body entrusted to it. Between Supreme Soviet sessions it takes decisions on all manner of state, economic, social and cultural issues, and also on defence and foreign relations. Its attention is constantly focussed on improving general well-being, safeguarding the rights and lawful interests of all citizens, enhancing socialist legality, and taking steps to curb crime and all infringements of the law.

Although its powers are not as great as those of the Supreme Soviet, the Constitution and other enactments endow it with fairly wide competence; its powers may be divided into three groups. The first group includes the appointment of elections to the USSR Supreme Soviet, preparing and convening its sessions, organising the work of the Supreme Soviet and all its bodies, promulgating laws adopted by the USSR Supreme Soviet, and so on. In exercising these powers, the Presidium functions as an integral part of the Supreme Soviet, ensuring the efficient and smooth-running work of both chambers, the standing committees and interim commissions, and of the deputies. Typically, many of these powers are exercised in close collaboration with the leadership of both chambers.

The second group appertains to the conduct of the business of the Supreme Soviet between its sessions. They include making partial amendments to legislation, appointing and relieving Government members, electing and relieving the USSR Supreme Court members, forming and reorganising all-Union administrative bodies, and declaring war in the event of an attack on the Soviet Union or of the need to fulfil international treaty obligations for mutual defence against aggression. It is important to note that all such decisions have to be ratified by the USSR Supreme Soviet.

Finally, the third extensive group of powers relates to questions which come within the exclusive jurisdiction of the Presidium as an independent higher state authority, such as the following:

- (a) interpreting the current laws of the USSR;
- (b) conducting nation-wide polls (referendums) on its own initiative or at the bidding of one of the Union Republics;
- (c) instituting Orders and Medals of the USSR and titles of honour;
- (d) conferring decorations and honours;

- (e) exercising the right of pardon;
- (f) instituting military titles, diplomatic ranks and other special titles;
- (g) appointing and replacing the Soviet High Command;
- (h) proclaiming general and partial mobilisation;
- (i) ratifying and annulling international treaties;
- (j) appointing and recalling Soviet plenipotentiaries abroad;
- (k) receiving letters of credence and recall of diplomatic representatives accredited by foreign states;
- (l) proclaiming martial law in various localities or for the whole country in the interests of Soviet defence or to ensure public order and state security.

Between Supreme Soviet sessions, the Soviet Government is accountable to the Presidium, which has the right to revoke any decisions and resolutions issued by the USSR Council of Ministers or the Councils of Ministers of the Union Republics if they flout the law.

The Presidium is further responsible for awarding Soviet citizenship or issuing permission for surrender of citizenship. It issues acts of amnesty and exercises the right of pardon in relation to people convicted by Soviet courts of law.

Many of the above-mentioned powers are associated with the Presidium's responsibility as the collective head of state. Its legal enactments include ordinances and decisions, the former being by-laws because they are issued in consequence of a law and should not contradict existing legislation. The Constitution also grants the Presidium the right to issue decrees which in urgent circumstances may contain new legal rules subject to the subsequent ratification by the USSR Supreme Soviet.

Ordinances and decisions, like Soviet laws, are issued under the signatures of the Presidium President and the Secretary. Since the Presidium is a collective body, all questions are debated and settled by collective decision, by all members present at a given meeting. The President summons meetings approximately once every two months. The chairmen of both chambers normally attend these meetings, as do invited deputies and members of state bodies and mass organisations. Since the war meetings have been more regular than hitherto and far more questions have been debated.



The Presidium adopts ordinances and decisions of a normative nature, examines issues concerning reorganisation of state administrative agencies, the appointment and dismissal of government members, election and dismissal of USSR Supreme Court members, the ratification of international treaties and agreements, the conferring of awards and honours, and the issue of pardon. The Presidium also regularly hears reports from the USSR Supreme Court Chairman, the Procurator-General, and individual Soviet ministers on various aspects of their work.

The Presidium also concerns itself greatly with inter-republican relations, their exchange of legislative experience, examination of boundary changes, and the transfer of individual factories and organisations from republican to all-Union jurisdiction or from all-Union jurisdiction to republican.

When it deals with questions concerning the application and strict observance of Soviet laws, the Presidium may in certain circumstances adopt ordinances that contain an interpretation and elucidation of existing legislation.

All members of the Presidium take part in preparations for meetings and have possession of all the necessary materials and documents on which they may base their opinions. Often members themselves bring up pressing issues for the consideration of the Presidium.

The Presidium receives many matters for examination from the USSR Council of Ministers, the USSR Supreme Court, the USSR Procurator's Office and other state agencies, from republican Supreme Soviets, mass organisations, Presidium members and deputies of the USSR Supreme Soviet. Whenever an item so demands, the Presidium sets up commissions headed by one of its Vice-Presidents, an ordinary member or its Secretary. Such commissions make a preliminary study of questions concerning the conferring of government awards, citizenship, pardon, etc. It may also form commissions for drawing up drafts of various enactments. On one occasion, for example, a commission was set up to prepare a draft Law on the Procedure for Recalling a USSR Supreme Soviet Deputy, which was later ratified at a Supreme Soviet session.

The Presidium President or one of his Vice-Presidents chairs meetings. The Vice-Presidents, in fact, assist the

President to exercise his functions. They may stand in for him by a rota established by the Presidium. On Presidium instructions, the President, Vice-Presidents and Secretary confer Soviet decorations and honours and receive letters of credence from foreign diplomats.

Another job of the President, Vice-Presidents and ordinary members is to give audience to members of the public and study their letters, applications and complaints.

The Secretary keeps an eye on the preparation and formulation of all enactments adopted by the Presidium and supervises the work of staff serving both chambers, the Presidium and standing committees. Many members of state bodies, scientific and mass organisations take an active part in the work of this staff.

Presidium meetings are extremely representative in that they are often attended by deputies with a special interest in the item under discussion, and by chamber chairmen, the Soviet Procurator-General, the Supreme Court Chairman, individual Soviet ministers and members of various mass organisations. All invited guests may take part in discussion.

Presidium meetings examine problems of paramount state importance with a view to promoting socialist democracy, encouraging greater public activity in tackling state, economic, social and cultural matters and improving the work of state administration.

The USSR Supreme Soviet assigns its deputies to work on the Presidium, which is wholly accountable to the Supreme Soviet (Art. 48 of the USSR Constitution). The Supreme Soviet can, in fact, reshuffle its personnel at any time and demand an account of its work or the work of any individual member.

The Presidium reports back to the USSR Supreme Soviet in the form of information on ordinances adopted by the Presidium between sessions and that have to be ratified by the USSR Supreme Soviet. Moreover, each session of the Supreme Soviet normally surveys Presidium reports.

In the sphere of relations between the Presidium and the Supreme Soviet chambers and standing committees, there is no form of subordination. All relations are founded on close collaboration and mutual assistance. The Presidium is, in fact, an agency co-ordinating the work of both chambers.

It hands over all proposals received for the inclusion of certain items of legislation on the agenda of a Supreme Soviet session to the chairmen of the Soviet of the Union and the Soviet of Nationalities for them to put before the USSR Supreme Soviet.

The Presidium further co-ordinates the business of both chambers, prepares documents and information that deputies require and conducts consultations. It is also responsible for promulgating all laws and other enactments adopted by the USSR Supreme Soviet in the republican languages, the verbatim reports of sessions and publishes *Vedomosti Verkhovnogo Sovieta SSSR (Gazette of the USSR Supreme Soviet)*.

It can issue direct instructions to standing committees for them to draw up a particular bill as, for example, it did when it delegated the Legislative Proposals Committees to prepare the draft Statute on the USSR Supreme Court. Further, it can assign to the standing committees bills or proposals on legislation which have already been presented to the Supreme Soviet as, for example, it did in assigning to the Legislative Proposals Committees the draft Fundamentals of Civil Legislation of the USSR and the Union Republics.

There have been cases when bills of the USSR and Presidium draft ordinances have been handed over to standing committees for their scrutiny. The Legislative Proposals Committees, for example, produced final findings on extending republican powers in the sphere of legislation; the final draft was then transmitted to the Supreme Soviet Presidium of the Union Republics for their remarks. More frequently, the Presidium consults the Foreign Affairs Committees on international treaties awaiting ratification.

In co-ordinating the work of the various committees, the Presidium transmits where necessary bills from one committee to another so as to solicit their opinion for the bill's final examination. It hears reports from the standing committees by way of confirming that they have done the job assigned to them. For example, it heard reports from both chairmen of the two Legislative Proposals Committees on how their work was progressing on the all-Union legislation entrusted them by the Presidium. Having studied the various aspects of the committees' activity, the Presidium outlined their further work on these bills.

In their turn, the standing committees not infrequently put forward their proposals to the Presidium. Cases have, in fact, occurred when the Presidium has decided to publish the drafts for nation-wide discussion so as to take account of public opinion when making the final draft.

Between sessions the Presidium maintains daily contact with Supreme Soviet deputies. If necessary it assists them in their constituencies, examines their proposals, forwards them to the appropriate all-Union and republican bodies and demands their timely implementation. It despatches to deputies all the information and other material they need to execute their functions and report to their constituents. It is also concerned with questions relating to the reimbursing of deputies for the money they spend in pursuit of their duties.

When the Supreme Soviet is not in session, it is the Presidium's responsibility to safeguard the deputies' parliamentary immunity. By provision of Article 52 of the Constitution, a deputy of the USSR Supreme Soviet is not liable to arrest or court proceedings without the authority of the Supreme Soviet or, when it is not in session, the authority of the Presidium of the USSR Supreme Soviet.

The Law on the Procedure for Deputy Recall, adopted on October 30, 1959, established that wherever legal circumstances warrant it, the Supreme Soviet Presidium can order a vote on the recall of a deputy who has lost the confidence of his constituents and supervise the electoral organisation. Having then checked the propriety of the recall, it fixes the date of the impending by-election for the vacant seat.

To carry out its functions, the Presidium has its own staff comprising various economic experts, officials and lawyers.

Literally hundreds of letters from the public arrive every day for the attention of the Presidium and its President. Many citizens personally appeal to the Presidium on issues which to them are of overriding importance. For this purpose, there exists a special Appeals' Reception Office where every visitor has a chance to explain his case in some detail. On appointed days the President, his Vice-Presidents and ordinary Presidium members personally receive members of the public; at other times Reception Office officials do the work.

These officials carefully consider all complaints and applications sent in to the Presidium and report on them



to the responsible members of the Presidium; if need be a final decision on them may be taken at a meeting of the Presidium.

Finally, the Presidium has a department that deals with arrangements for accommodating and looking after deputies while they are at sessions, and for looking after foreign guests invited by the USSR Supreme Soviet and its Presidium.

#### LEGISLATIVE AND SUPERVISORY POWERS OF THE USSR SUPREME SOVIET

The preparation and adoption of legislation form a key part of Supreme Soviet activity. By issuing laws, the will of the Soviet people led by the working class is translated into the will of the state.<sup>2</sup>

Today the legislative powers of the country's supreme body are constantly expanding, as the considerable growth in legislation in the last few years testifies. It is also apparent in the expanding range of questions regulated by laws, particularly in the economic, social and cultural fields, in the changing balance between all-Union and republican legislation in favour of the latter, elaborated on the basis of fundamentals for various branches of law.

To make legislation an effective means of organising social relations and promoting economic and cultural development, it has to respond to changing social conditions and answer the maturing needs of progressive development. Marx put it another way, "A legislator ... should view himself as a natural scientist. He does not ... invent laws, he only formulates them, he expresses the inner laws of spiritual relations in conscious and positive laws."<sup>3</sup>

The economic and cultural life of the community building communism becomes more complicated and multifarious every year. Law that fixes social relations cannot remain in force for long since it would hamper the emergence of new social relations. It has to progress along with society, keenly alive to all salient social changes.

More and more people from all walks of life must therefore be drawn into the making of laws. Soviet legislation reflects the popular common will and takes account of all

the paramount interests of various groups among the population and of various sectors of life. Lenin once said that "collective experience, the experience of millions can alone give us decisive guidance in this respect, precisely because, for our task, for the task of building socialism, the experience of the hundreds and hundreds of thousands of those upper sections which have made history up to now in feudal society and in capitalist society is insufficient. We cannot proceed in this way precisely because we rely on joint experience, on the experience of millions of working people."<sup>4</sup>

The ever expanding popular participation in legislation is typical of all legislative activity of the country's higher state bodies. It can justly be said that Soviet legislation is the culmination of the active involvement of hundreds of thousands, sometimes of millions of people. The famous proletarian writer Maxim Gorky said that "laws in the Soviet Union are created from below, in the midst of the working people; they emerge out of the conditions of their life. The Soviet Government and Party only formulate and ratify laws that have matured in the course of the labour of workers and peasants whose main aim is to create a community of equals."<sup>5</sup>

Popular involvement in making laws takes innumerable forms and Soviet citizens are becoming increasingly engaged in legislative activity and in proposing the adoption of new laws. Whenever the situation arises for existing legislation to be amended or for new laws to be passed, individuals or groups of people, or their organisations put the matters to the relevant state agencies. This occurs when the old legal enactments curb or hamper the development of new relations in society. Clearly, a single letter, or a newspaper item, or an agency representation cannot at once be accepted as the basis for amending legislation; they become part of the steadily crystallising public opinion which enables the people objectively to study a question and express their will. Here the Communist Party has a big part to play in helping to shape public opinion by opportunely supporting and encouraging anything that is progressive and worthwhile.

In some cases, public opinion expressed in letters from the public and newspaper articles is the starting point for an amendment to existing, but outmoded, legal rules that are hampering social relations. Letters and applications from

the public to state bodies are more and more concerned with overall economic and cultural progress and with improving legislation. In recent years a number of sociological surveys, questionnaires and newspaper opinion polls have been carried out. These are, of course, immensely important in manifesting public opinion and revealing the state of affairs in different sections of life, including Soviet legislation.

Electors' instructions are another major form of popular involvement in legislation. They raise questions not merely of local interest, but of common concern in improving economic management and political administration. Often they voice the need for amendments or supplements to current laws.

Another important means of public influence on legislation is the proposals made at public meetings. In particular, a study of the materials of congresses and sectional meetings show that their members often put forward suggestions that subsequently find their way into the statute book.<sup>6</sup> When the objective conditions for adopting a bill have matured, the responsible state bodies or agencies of mass organisations take practical steps to draft an act. In doing so they compare the most diverse viewpoints and make a profound analysis of the relations which the law is called upon to regulate; they weigh up all possible consequences of the future law's impact on contiguous juridical relations and on current enforceable enactments. Laws, after all, are made to last for dozens of years.

Lenin insisted on an extremely serious attitude to legislation and warned against rushing through laws or making errors in their formulation. The initial Soviet draft laws that he personally penned provide excellent models from the standpoint of their high juridical quality and political expediency. Today, when Soviet legislation is changing so quickly, Lenin's instructions on legislative work and his personal experience in drafting major enactments have exceptional importance.

The Soviet system of consistent and sometimes repeated examination of a draft law with the involvement of local agencies and various experts is an essential way of obtaining a sound and well-grounded draft law. It guarantees an opportunity for free expression and comparison of various opinions to make the draft free of any departmental onesi-

dedness and elicit the opinion of the very people who are to implement it when it becomes law. It is no less vital for the new enactment to take account of the experience of previous legislative process so that it might not clash with other enforceable enactments.

It sometimes happens that the Supreme Soviet Presidium or one of the standing committees are directly involved in the preliminary work on draft legislation. Although this may be quite justified, in cases where a bill deals with a certain sphere of social relations, a specific economic or cultural field, the respective sectional administrative body draws up the draft and then presents it for a final conclusion by a standing committee of the supreme authority.

An analysis of work on preliminary draft legislation in recent years shows that certain shifts have occurred. First and foremost is the increasing role of the Communist Party and its Central Committee in the formulating of new legislation. This is perfectly natural, since the Party is the guiding and directing force of Soviet society, has extremely close ties with the people and, therefore, is best able promptly to reveal contradictions in Soviet development, lead the campaign to remove outmoded social forms and introduce and fix new progressive forms.

An illustration of this are the economic reform measures taken in conformity with decisions of the plenary meetings of the Party Central Committee. Informed opinion, industrial and agricultural experts and Communists working in various sectors of the economy had spoken out in meetings, the press and their mass organisations about the outmoded economic management methods that were holding back economic growth, preventing the management from capitalising on the advantages of socialist production and cramping the initiative of workers in industry and agriculture.

The Party deeply and comprehensively studied and learned from the danger signals and public suggestions. All the comments, articles and letters were most meticulously gathered and collated. Before any final decision was taken, several proposals were put to a practical test in individual factories and among groups of workers. The conclusions were presented for discussion by the Party



Central Committee at its plenary meetings. The subsequent decisions served as the basis for the USSR and republican Supreme Soviets and Presidium to draw up and adopt legislative enactments affecting major spheres of economic management.

Another feature of recent legislation is the increasing and multifarious involvement of mass organisations which frequently spark off legislation and even themselves directly prepare draft laws. One might cite, for example, the Trade Union Central Council and its proposal for drawing up the important Regulations for the Handling of Labour Disputes which was ratified by an ordinance of the USSR Supreme Soviet on January 31, 1957.

Similarly, the Komsomol Central Committee was one of the sponsors of the Presidium ordinance of July 9, 1965, on free state transport to and from school for rural pupils of primary and secondary schools. Komsomol members took an active part in preparing this issue in the Legislative Proposals Committees and put forward several specific proposals.

In fact, it is hard to name any major legislation that has not involved members of mass organisations. They have generally been involved in all stages of the bill's passage through state agencies. Increasingly, government and non-government bodies are working together in drafting new enactments. Many are drafted by the government or sectional administrative bodies jointly with trade unions.

In some cases the Party Central Committee co-operates with the USSR Council of Ministers in drafting major legislation which is then put before the USSR Supreme Soviet.

Yet another characteristic feature of current legislation is the increasing consideration being given to the opinion of officials and experts in the localities and using the experience of local bodies to try out proposed amendments to existing legislation. Lenin explicitly said that the working people can only effectively improve Soviet legislation "when they receive the decree, test it, try it in practice and tell us how to correct it"...<sup>7</sup> Nowadays localities regularly discuss draft laws on the most varied topics.

If one analyses legislative work over the past ten-fifteen years it is apparent that before being presented to the supreme

authorities, many bills were debated on a nation-wide scale. Only then were they put before the Supreme Soviet which could draw on the experience of the public.

First of all, a few words about the power to initiate legislation. This power enjoyed by appropriate bodies includes the right to move an amendment, a supplement or the repeal of a law in force. But one important thing should be taken into account. A bill introduced by an organ or person entitled to initiate legislation must be examined by the Supreme Soviet and included by it in its agenda.

A large number of bodies and officials enjoy the right to introduce items for the examination of the USSR Supreme Soviet, including the right to introduce proposals on legislative issues. They comprise largely agencies elected by the Supreme Soviet: the Supreme Soviet Presidium, chamber committees, the Council of Ministers of the USSR, Chairman and Vice-Chairman of the Supreme Soviet and groups of deputies or individual deputies of the Supreme Soviet. By Article 38 of the Soviet Constitution, both chambers of the Supreme Soviet enjoy the right equally to initiate legislation. Sometimes chamber chairmen also use the right.

The fifteen Union Republics can exercise their right to initiate legislation through their supreme agencies of state authority. The USSR Supreme Court, too, has the right to initiate legislation in accordance with the USSR Supreme Court Statute ratified on February 12, 1957.

The right to initiate legislation is also enjoyed by the trade unions as represented by the Central Trade Union Council. As a rule, bills are introduced jointly by the CC CPSU and the USSR Council of Ministers, or by the USSR Council of Ministers and the Central TUC.

Once a bill has been introduced to the USSR Supreme Soviet, work on the draft is not over. In fact, the Supreme Soviet does not simply debate and adopt the enforceable enactment at its session; before it can do so, the Presidium, standing committees or *ad hoc* commissions and deputies all take part in preliminary work on the bill so as to facilitate the sessional debate and enable deputies to be well prepared to examine and adopt the new legislation. The bill has to pass through the various stages described above after its official introduction to the Supreme Soviet.

The laws adopted by the Supreme Soviet after extensive and direct public involvement along the lines described above reflect the constant government concern for advancing socialist production, bolstering the country's economic might and ensuring on that basis progressive improvements in material and cultural standards. Examples of recent legislation are the law on a shorter working week, higher wages, special benefits for women and adolescents, higher pensions for war invalids, a new labour legislation and a legislation on health protection.

In 1966-1970 the per capita income increased by 33 per cent. The average monthly wages and salaries went up by 26 per cent to 122 rubles a month, as compared with 96.5 rubles in 1965. In every branch of the Soviet economy the minimum wages of industrial and office workers were raised. In 1970 the remuneration of labour for collective farmers increased by 42 per cent over 1965. Income-tax rates on wages and salaries for some categories of industrial and office workers were reduced. In conformity with the laws passed by the Soviet Parliament, industrial and office workers were transferred to a five-day working week, with two days off. The duration of the annual holiday for industrial and office workers was increased. Payments and benefits accruing to the population from the public consumption funds in the five-year period increased by over 50 per cent. In 1970 they came to 262 rubles per capita, as compared to 182 rubles in 1965.

Every third person in the Soviet Union is studying at some type of educational establishment. The number of specialists with a higher or specialised secondary education rose by more than 60 per cent, as compared with the figure dating to the beginning of the eighth five-year plan period.

Public health services, based on the principle of providing the population with free medical care, have been steadily improved. The Soviet Union leads the world in the number of doctors per 10,000 population: this figure now stands at 27.

In 1966-1970 nearly 55 million persons moved to better living quarters. In the year 1970, three million families, or 11.2 million people, moved to new flats. Moreover, rent and utilities amount to 4-5 rubles per every 100 rubles of family income.

Much has been done in the provision of pensions, particularly as a result of the 1956 State Pensions Law and the 1964 Law on Pensions and Benefits for Collective-Farm Members. Some 42 million people are duly in receipt of pensions.

Of great importance for the consolidation of the family, the protection of mother and child welfare are the Fundamentals of the USSR and the Union Republics on marriage and the family, adopted in 1968.

The USSR Supreme Soviet also passed several Fundamentals of civil and criminal legislation, the judiciary and legal procedure. They strengthened socialist legality, safeguarded the constitutional rights of all Soviet citizens, enhanced the democratic principles of the judicature and brought legal rules into line with contemporary requirements of Soviet society.

The entire legislative activity of the USSR Supreme Soviet exudes concern that the Soviet citizen should live better, enjoy a higher standard of living and culture, and have his liberties and legitimate interests protected.

At the same time as it has increased its legislative powers in recent years, the Supreme Soviet has also substantially widened its supervisory functions. It either discharges these functions itself directly or it delegates them to its chambers and committees and to the Presidium.

The USSR Supreme Soviet exercises supreme control over the observance of the Soviet Constitution and of the Soviet laws by all state agencies. Of special importance is its control over the day-to-day activity of the Council of Ministers, the supreme executive and administrative state authority. Reports on the business of the government and its ministries are regularly debated at Supreme Soviet sessions.

Article 51 of the Constitution requires the Supreme Soviet to appoint enquiry and auditing commissions on any issue whenever it deems it necessary. All institutions and officials are bound to implement the demands of these commissions and show them the requisite documents and materials.

Deputies have the right, by Article 71, to request information from the Soviet Government, ministries, committee and department heads. Usually such a question to the government is made in the name of a group of deputies. The govern-



ment or ministry to whom the question is addressed has no more than three days to provide an oral or written answer in the chamber concerned. In response to the government reply, the Supreme Soviet passes a decision evaluating the government action on the given question. The right to request information is one form of the Supreme Soviet's supervision over the work of Soviet executive and administrative agencies.

Requests for information may, of course, be put on domestic and foreign affairs. They stem from a desire on the part of a deputy's constituents and the public at large to gain information on matters that interest them, and are called upon to help the appropriate bodies come to the right decision. They play an important part in eliminating flaws in administrative work and, as Lenin once said, they are a major weapon in combatting red tape.<sup>8</sup>

The Supreme Soviet also uses its supervisory powers to ratify ordinances of the Presidium relating to the appointment or dismissal of top state officials. It has *the right to refuse an appointment* if it has any doubts about the personal or functional capabilities of the appointee. Furthermore, if anyone does his job badly, it can terminate his position either on its own initiative or on that of the government and the Presidium.

*The Supreme Soviet standing committees do a great deal of supervisory work in seeing that the Supreme Soviet's laws are carried out.* To these ends they *hear reports* from ministerial and departmental chiefs on the implementation of the laws. Thus, the Planning and Budget Committees regularly hear such reports on meeting the targets of the state economic plan and Budget. Foreign Affairs Committees supervise the execution of Supreme Soviet decisions on foreign policy matters. Sectional standing committees see that the laws are implemented by the various economic and cultural sectors.

As the supreme state authority, the Supreme Soviet expresses and implements the sovereignty of the Soviet people and, in doing so, more widely and effectively exercises its powers in legislation and control over the activity of all the Soviet Union's higher agencies. It possesses complete and undivided supremacy among the agencies of the Soviet state and sets all state bodies a splendid

example on how to serve the people and safeguard their interests.

As socialist democracy extends, the part played by the USSR Supreme Soviet will burgeon in all sectors of state guidance and its association with the broad public will become even closer.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> V. I. Lenin, *Collected Works*, Vol. 26, p. 338.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. 25, p. 90.

<sup>3</sup> Marx/Engels, *Werke*, Bd. 1, Dietz Verlag, Berlin, 1969, S. 149.

<sup>4</sup> V. I. Lenin, *Collected Works*, Vol. 27, p. 410.

<sup>5</sup> M. Gorky, *Collected Works* (Russ. ed.), Vol. 26, M., 1953, p. 267.

<sup>6</sup> V. F. Kotok, *Syezdy i soveshchaniya trudyashchikhsya—forma nyeposredstvennoi demokratii* (*Workers' Congresses and Meetings as a Form of Direct Democracy*), M., 1964, p. 74.

<sup>7</sup> V. I. Lenin, *Collected Works*, Vol. 27, p. 525.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. 35, p. 523.

## CHAPTER 4

### THE SUPREME SOVIETS OF THE UNION REPUBLICS

The Union of Soviet Socialist Republics is a federation comprising fifteen Union Republics: the Russian Federation (RSFSR), the Ukraine, Byelorussia, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Georgia, Azerbaijan, Lithuania, Moldavia, Latvia, Kirghizia, Tajikistan, Armenia, Turkmenia and Estonia.

Each constituent republic is a sovereign Soviet socialist state covering a historically-formed area, which is one of the paramount attributes of the state in each republic and the material basis of its sovereignty. Pursuant to the Constitution of the USSR, no Union Republic can have its boundaries changed without its consent. Every Union Republic has its own citizenship and exercises the right of accepting or refusing citizenship; similarly, every one of the fifteen republics has its own Constitution\* which it adopts on its own account, without subsequent ratification by a USSR state body. It exercises control over observance of its Constitution and independently determines its own administrative and territorial structure. Its terms of reference include approval of its economic plan, which defines and directs its economic activity, and of the state budget and the report on its execution. It imposes, in conformity with the USSR legislation, state and local taxes and levies, administers the banks and industrial, agricultural and trading enterprises and organisations within its jurisdiction. Furthermore, it defines procedure for using the land, natural deposits, the forests and waters; it superintends the building of houses and amenities

\* Extraordinary congresses of Soviets held between January and March 1937 adopted the Constitutions of the RSFSR, the Ukraine, Byelorussia, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Georgia, Azerbaijan, Kirghizia, Tajikistan, Armenia and Turkmenia. The Lithuanian, Latvian and Estonian Constitutions were adopted in July 1940, the Moldavian in February 1941.

of towns and other populated areas, and of roads; it superintends transport and communications, health protection, social security, primary, secondary and higher education, and cultural, educational and scientific institutions in the republic. It adopts civil and criminal codes, issues laws on labour, marriage and the family, and the judiciary, safeguards public order and civil rights and liberties within the republic; finally, it is empowered to create its own republican military formations, etc. In other words, the Union Republic independently manages all its own internal affairs.

The Union Republics enjoy several important powers in foreign affairs: to establish direct relations with foreign states, conclude agreements with them and exchange diplomatic and consular representatives. In fact, two republics, Byelorussia and the Ukraine, are members of the United Nations and are particularly active in foreign affairs, take part in UN bodies, and conclude conventions and agreements. Similarly, other republics are active in foreign policy, participating in the settlement of border and customs disputes with adjacent countries, concluding various agreements and participating in international organisations. Today, for example, the Russian Federation uses its republican bodies to take part in the work of 48 international organisations and their agencies: UNESCO, the International Bureau of Education, the Inland Transport Committee of the UN Economic Commission for Europe, the Inland Transport and Communications Committee of the Economic Commission for Asia and the Far East, the International Social Security Association, the International Water Supply Association, the Conference of European Statisticians of the Economic Commission for Europe, the International Labour Organisation, the International Centre for Advanced Technical and Vocational Training, the International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources, etc.

#### THE SUPREME REPRESENTATIVE ORGAN OF THE UNION REPUBLIC

Each Union Republic has its higher state bodies—the Supreme Soviet and the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet, its government—the Council of Ministers, and its supreme judicial body—the Supreme Court.



The Supreme Soviet has a special place among all the republican state agencies. It is elected by all citizens of the republic aged 18 and over on the basis of universal, equal and direct suffrage by secret ballot, for a period of four years. Any Soviet citizen who has the vote and is at least 21 years of age can stand for election to the republican Supreme Soviet. Rates of representation vary from republic to republic and are defined in the various constitutions with account for the specific conditions of each republic and its population.

As a result, the numerical composition of each Supreme Soviet differs, as the following figures show (based on 1971 election returns for Union republican Supreme Soviets):<sup>1</sup>

RSFSR Supreme Soviet	894	deputies
Ukrainian Supreme Soviet	484	"
Byelorussian Supreme Soviet	425	"
Uzbek Supreme Soviet	452	"
Kazakh Supreme Soviet	482	"
Georgian Supreme Soviet	400	"
Azerbaijan Supreme Soviet	385	"
Lithuanian Supreme Soviet	300	"
Moldavian Supreme Soviet	315	"
Latvian Supreme Soviet	310	"
Kirghiz Supreme Soviet	339	"
Tajik Supreme Soviet	315	"
Armenian Supreme Soviet	310	"
Turkmenian Supreme Soviet	285	"
Estonian Supreme Soviet	183	"

The Supreme Soviet is the highest state body of each Union Republic presiding over the entire system of state agencies. It plays a decisive part in implementing the republic's powers, having the competence to examine and settle any issue concerned with republican business, irrespective of what republican state bodies are responsible for the given issue. The Constitution of each Union Republic establishes the exclusive competence of the Supreme Soviet. Only it has the right to adopt the republican Constitution and to make amendments and additions to it.

It has the exclusive prerogative to issue its own legislation and only it can examine and resolve all matters of its own competence whose resolution has to invoke the law. Only the Supreme Soviet has the right to approve the State

Plan and State Budget of the Union Republic and survey reports on their implementation.

Other powers that exceed the bounds of the Supreme Soviet's exclusive powers are exercised both by the Supreme Soviet and by other higher state bodies of the republic. Here too, however, the Supreme Soviet is all-important, since it forms these bodies and makes them answerable to it in everything they do. The Supreme Soviet appoints its Presidium and forms its government; all the activities of these agencies come under its control.

Supreme Soviet competence extends into the judicial field in that the Supreme Soviet appoints the Supreme Court, the republic's highest legal agency, which is responsible and subordinated to it.

All paths, therefore, lead to the Supreme Soviet; it decides all the principal issues in the life of the republic and is backed by the whole force of state authority at republican level. Each Supreme Soviet is the genuinely representative body of the entire republican populace and expresses their sovereign will.

By way of example, we present some information on the Byelorussian Supreme Soviet. Elections to its Supreme Soviet took place in June 1971; 5,874,561 people, i.e., 99.97 per cent of the electorate, actually voted and, of these, 5,871,319, or 99.94 per cent of recorded votes, went to deputy nominees. What do these figures show? Most importantly, they provide proof that every elected deputy of the Byelorussian Supreme Soviet is a representative of virtually the entire electorate.<sup>2</sup>

That applies equally to all other republics. According to returns of the June 1971 republican Supreme Soviet elections, 99.89 per cent of the electorate who went to the polls voted for the nominated candidates. Altogether, 99.96 per cent of the entire republican electorate recorded their vote.<sup>3</sup>

That the overwhelming majority of voters do elect the republican Supreme Soviets is the principal but far from solitary proof of their truly representative nature. If we look at the figures, for example, on social composition of deputies to republican Supreme Soviets, it would appear that 29.6 per cent are industrial workers, 20.8 per cent are collective farmers, and 49.6 per cent are office and professional workers engaged in various branches of the economy:

industry, agriculture, building, transport, communications, trade, science, culture, education or health.

No less instructive is the national composition of deputies. In the seventh RSFSR Supreme Soviet, for example, the deputies comprise 37 nationalities, including Russian, Ukrainian, Byelorussian, Avar, Adyghei, Bashkir, Buryat, Ingush, Kabardinian, Karelian, Komi, Mari, Mordovian, Ossetian, Tatar, Udmurt, Chechen, Chuvash, Yakut and 18 other nationalities. The national make-up of deputies to the seventh convocation of the Supreme Soviets of all the Union Republics is as follows:<sup>4</sup>

Of the 5,830 total, there are:

1,549 Russians	219 Moldavians
594 Ukrainians	230 Letts
341 Byelorussians	199 Kirghizes
384 Uzbeks	239 Tajiks
241 Kazakhs	341 Armenians
323 Georgians	221 Turkmenians
320 Azerbaijanians	156 Estonians
233 Lithuanians	240 others

This national composition of the republican supreme bodies mirrors the unshakeable fraternal friendship of all Soviet peoples, the triumph of the Leninist national policy, and convincingly testifies to the truly representative nature of the republican Supreme Soviets.

Equally, they are representative because they consist of women as well as men, young as well as old. The age composition of deputies to the seventh Georgian Supreme Soviet, for example, is: 13 deputies under 24, 39 in the 25-29 age group, 100 in the 30-39 group, 134 in the 40-49 group, and 114 older than 50. Further, they comprise 31.3 per cent women and 68.7 per cent men. A total of women elected to all republican Supreme Soviets in 1971 is 2,045, or 34.8 per cent of the deputy body. As many as 17.2 per cent of all deputies are under 30 years old.<sup>5</sup>

In Soviet times all the Union Republics have done well economically and culturally, as is evident in their social composition, level of culture and in the make-up of their Supreme Soviets. If we take one of the previously most backward republics, Turkmenia, we find that only 26.9 per cent of its deputies to the first Supreme Soviet (1939-1946) had

higher than elementary education (higher, incomplete higher, secondary and incomplete secondary).<sup>6</sup> Yet, at the seventh convocation, 96.5 per cent of all deputies had above-elementary education.<sup>7</sup>

Similarly with women; we discover that only 35 women, or 19.4 per cent of all deputies, took their seats in the first Turkmenian parliament.<sup>8</sup> The number had grown to 84, or 32.5 per cent, in the fourth convocation,<sup>9</sup> and to 100 (35.1 per cent), in the seventh convocation in 1967.<sup>10</sup> These indices are especially meaningful inasmuch as they reflect the radical transformation in the status of Turkmenian women; from being literally servile to their fathers and husbands, they are now energetic participants in the republic's social and political life.

#### SUPREME SOVIET SESSIONS

Like the USSR Supreme Soviet, the republican Supreme Soviets are not permanently in session. The republican constitutions require the Presidiums to summon sessions of the Supreme Soviets twice a year. Extraordinary sessions may also be called, either on the initiative of the Presidiums or at the bidding of one-third of a republic's Supreme Soviet deputies.\*

The Presidium summons the first session of a newly-elected Supreme Soviet not later than three months following elections. It fixes the session date depending on the urgency of debates on state and economic questions and on considerations of state expediency. In practice, the republican Supreme Soviets meet more than twice a year. The Estonian Supreme Soviet, fifth convocation, for example, met four times in 1961.<sup>11</sup>

The duration of a session is not fixed beforehand. The Soviet does not rise until all items put on the agenda for that particular session are dealt with. Due to the profound democratic nature, efficient preparation and business-like approach to sessional work the Supreme Soviets are able to dispense their business relatively quickly by all-round and careful study and discussion. Sessions normally last two or three days, although in certain circumstances—depending

\* In Estonia it is at the bidding of one-fifth of the total number of deputies.



on the nature of the agenda business and number of items—the duration may be greater or smaller. The first session of the Russian Federation Supreme Soviet, first convocation, for example, lasted from July 15 to 20, 1938.<sup>12</sup> On the other hand, the Russian republic's jubilee session celebrating 300 years of the Ukrainian-Russian union lasted just one day, May 29, 1954.<sup>13</sup>

The procedure for handling business is laid down in standing orders<sup>14</sup> and in traditions that have formed over the years. It is quite similar to the procedure operative in the USSR Supreme Soviet, although differing in some respects attributable to the peculiar structure of each republican Supreme Soviet. The main difference is that the republican Supreme Soviets are uni-cameral because the specific interests of republican nationalities are catered for in the USSR Supreme Soviet. There is therefore no need for a second chamber in the republican Supreme Soviets. Nevertheless, the uni-cameral structure does not, of course, preclude representation of all the republic's nationalities. All the higher bodies of state authority in the republics contain representatives of many nationalities working in the single chamber of the republican Supreme Soviet. This is particularly relevant to the RSFSR which is made up of many national states and nation-state formations.

The Chairman and his Vice-Chairmen supervise all the business of republican Supreme Soviet sessions.\* Deputies to these posts are elected at the initial Supreme Soviet session of each new convocation. The Chairman is specifically required to ensure that a quorum is present at sessional meetings\*\*; he appoints rapporteurs and co-rapporteurs on agenda items, conducts voting and announces the results; he makes known written questions, personal applications, information enquiries and other documents sent to the Supreme Soviet; he signs the minutes of each meeting, approves the texts of official communications on Supreme Soviet business,

\* The number of Vice-Chairmen of a republican Supreme Soviet is specified in its Constitution. The Russian Federation Supreme Soviet appoints eight, the Supreme Soviets of the Ukraine, Byelorussia, Lithuania and Moldavia appoint four, Kazakhstan three, and the other nine republics two each.

\*\* Republican Supreme Soviet meetings are considered valid if a majority of deputies are present.

represents his Supreme Soviet in relations with state bodies and mass organisations and disposes of expense accounts that are annually allotted in the budget for representing and implementing contacts with deputies.

His Vice-Chairmen discuss with him all items related to organisation of sessional business, chair meetings in the Chairman's absence and perform other organisational functions that normally fall within the scope of the Chairman.

An internal advisory body, the Elders' Council, is formed in all Supreme Soviets to make a preliminary study of questions relating to the organisation and conduct of sessions. Its composition is built up to represent a certain number of deputies. According to the standing orders of the Latvian Supreme Soviet, for example, the Elders' Council comprises one member from each rural district and one from every six deputies elected in republican towns. This is at variance with the procedure used in the Russian Federation Supreme Soviet where, by tradition, the Council consists of members of groups of deputies from each Autonomous Republic, Autonomous region, territory, region and the cities of Moscow and Leningrad.<sup>15</sup> This takes into consideration also deputies from the given territory, region and town.

The Elders' Council preliminarily discusses organisational questions like the agenda and rules of meetings, nominations for Chairman and Vice-Chairmen, the formation and composition of standing committees and the composition of the Supreme Soviet Presidium.

The procedure for conducting sessions fully ensures that deputies will play an active part in dealing with all essential questions of the meetings. Significantly, the deputies themselves have the final say in determining the sessional agenda and the procedure for conducting the session. They have the right to propose changes and additions to the draft agenda, which are then put to the vote. Moreover, they also establish the order of discussion and adoption of draft legislation and the termination of debates on items under discussion. Lastly, proposals on all major organisational questions put before the Supreme Soviet also represent the collective opinion of deputies expressed in the Elders' Council and in the committees.

The organisation of debates and adoption of decisions testify to the democratic nature of the republican Supreme

Soviets and the business-like character of their sessions. In all their procedure for examining and settling issues they provide thorough and detailed discussion, consideration for opinions and proposals of all deputies, purposefulness in their work, and collectivity in taking decisions.

The standing orders adopted at the initial sessions for subsequent meetings play an important part in ensuring business-like debates and initiative from deputies. They establish the time of meetings and maximum duration of speeches so that as many deputies as possible may have a chance to speak. As a means of encouraging initiative, they enable deputies to make co-reports on items under discussion, fix a prompt schedule for announcing special deputy's questions, personal applications and factual information.

Any item that comes before the republican Supreme Soviet is not immediately scheduled for debate. It is preceded by a report or communication which justifies the need for the Supreme Soviet to settle the given issue, sets out the major points of draft legislation or, in the case of a government report, provides a comprehensive description of its work in a particular sphere. The deputies are able to study the bills with the help of the reports and also, as a rule, by means of the preliminary study of the bills and requisite reference materials.

The body or organisation that has raised an issue—the Presidium, republican Council of Ministers, standing committees, etc.—appoints a rapporteur. If a group of deputies has raised the issue, they must simultaneously nominate a rapporteur. Once a question is on the agenda, deputies give it their careful consideration. If they wish to speak in the debate, they have to make an application to the Chairman and wait their turn. Every speaker may use his native language. Debates are terminated on a show of hands. As well as deputies, members of various state bodies and mass organisations may often speak in the republican Supreme Soviets.

That discussions are lively and well-organised is apparent from the fact that some 200 deputies spoke in debates during the eight sessions of the sixth Russian Federation Supreme Soviet. Such speeches contain remarks and concrete suggestions and, more often than not, critically evaluate the work of state bodies under review. They analyse local affairs

and voice an opinion on ways to eradicate shortcomings. At the third session of the Armenian Supreme Soviet,<sup>16</sup> seventh convocation, attention was given to improvements in the work of local Soviets, a topic that greatly interested the Armenian public. In fact, long before the session had opened, the whole question had come under serious discussion in towns and villages. Officials of the Soviets and members of standing committees had advanced their proposals. Everyone wanted the discussion to be broad, representative and, at the same time, meaningful. Preparatory work was particularly wide-ranging in Yerevan, the Armenian capital. When all the material had come in, the Armenian Supreme Soviet Presidium was able to use it and in consultation with a group of experts drew up draft Statute on Standing Committees and recommendations for improving the work of local Soviets.

The Chairman of the Armenian Council of Ministers reported on the latest experience of Soviet development in the republic and made several suggestions for improving the work of the town, district, rural and township Soviets.

All questions brought before the Supreme Soviet are put to a vote and deputies have to make up their minds whether they will vote at once for the entire bill or whether they will take a preliminary vote on parts of it (e.g., sections, chapters and articles). Where the bill is voted on section by section, it has to gain acceptance finally by a vote on the bill in its entirety. As in the USSR Supreme Soviet, voting is open on all questions. With the exception of amendments to the republican constitution, which have to gain no less than a two-thirds majority, a decision is considered valid if it is passed by a simple majority.

It need hardly be stressed that the republican Supreme Soviets lean heavily for support on the vast preparatory work that is put in before discussion of most questions directly in their meetings. Much of this work is done in standing committees of the Supreme Soviets.

#### STANDING COMMITTEES

The first session of a newly-elected Supreme Soviet normally appoints standing committees from among its deputies for the whole duration of its office. It is the task of the



republican Supreme Soviets to determine what committees they ought to create, depending on practical requirements.

In the two years 1955 and 1956, each of them appointed about three or four such committees: Legislative Proposals, Budget, Credentials and, in some republics, Foreign Affairs. Since then they have tended to broaden their functions and consequently set up more committees. Thus, from 1959 to 1963, the fifth convocation of Supreme Soviets had 127 committees instead of the previous 45, while the sixth convocation had 145. This increase resulted from the formation of a large number of sectional committees for one, two or three combined administrative sectors.

The 1967 seventh convocation brought with it 199 standing committees, including Credentials, Planning and Budget, Legislative Proposals, Foreign Affairs, on Youth Affairs and committees for various sectors of the economy and culture. The following sectional committees, for example, were appointed at the first session of the Ukrainian Supreme Soviet: heavy and chemical industry, engineering and instrument making, light industry, food industry, local industry, construction, transport and communications, agriculture, municipal amenities and social services, trade and public catering, education, science and culture, health and social security.<sup>17</sup>

At the present time, the Supreme Soviet standing committees in the Union Republics engage 4,000 deputies, i.e., over 60 per cent of the people's representatives elected to their supreme state bodies. The committees are, therefore, the chief means of involving deputies in the permanent work of their Soviets between sessions. The Supreme Soviet also determines the numerical composition of each committee, depending on the volume and character of its work and the number of its deputies. It may consequently vary from 9 to 41 members.

In short, the standing committees are permanently operating auxiliary bodies of the Supreme Soviet. In everything they do they are subordinate to the Supreme Soviet and accountable to it. Between sessions, the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet co-ordinates the activity of the standing committees. Special statutes on them, ratified by the Supreme Soviets, spell out their rights and duties, and the procedure for their organisation and work.<sup>18</sup> In conformity with these statutes and the tasks they have been assigned, the standing

committees prepare their conclusions on draft legislation or other drafts that have been presented to the Supreme Soviets by the government, other state agencies and individual deputies. As an illustration, the Planning and Budget Committee, the Youth Committee, and sectional committees annually review the draft economic plans and state budgets, and the reports on the execution of state budgets. They then draw up their own proposals and remarks which they include in their conclusions on these documents. On their own initiative, or on the instructions of the Supreme Soviet or its Presidium, they draft bills for the republican Supreme Soviet. It is noteworthy that most laws adopted in the last ten years by the Supreme Soviets were presented for ratification by their standing committees.

They also have a hand in implementing laws and other acts passed by their central republican bodies, largely by supervising the activity of the relevant state agencies.

Control is exercised in various forms. Standing committee control over the work of the higher organs of state administration in the Union Republics, their Ministries and departments, is of great importance. This is due to the fact that the practical implementation of measures prescribed by laws or other enactments passed by the Supreme Soviets of the Union Republics devolves first of all on these organs of state administration. The standing committees review the reports and communications made by heads of republican Ministries or departments, they look into the work not only of the Ministries and departments, but of the various enterprises and organisations placed within the latter's jurisdiction.

In recent years the standing committees have done a great deal of work in the sphere of control over the functioning of local Soviets by means of studying the various aspects of their activities.

But control is only one aspect of their work; organisation is equally important. The committees frequently elaborate measures for improving the work of the republican administrative apparatus, or making better use of material resources, or boosting industry, agriculture and public services.

The Russian Supreme Soviet Standing Committee on Health and Social Security, for example, has shown much

initiative in raising questions and helping to resolve them. When the state of the children's medical service was under review, the committee instructed all its members to carry out on-the-spot investigations all over the republic. With the co-operation of the local Soviet standing committees and voluntary medical helpers, committee members checked on the situation in the Mari Autonomous Republic, the Krasnodar and Krasnoyarsk Territories, and the Bryansk, Vologda and Irkutsk Regions.

Acting on the voluminous and specific material gathered in the localities, official statistics and ministerial and departmental reports and information, the committee drew up a number of proposals and recommendations aimed at improving children's health protection. It forwarded these conclusions to the Russian Federation Council of Ministers, ministries and departments. Subsequently, the republican government approved the proposals and, on their basis, took steps to improve children's health protection in the Russian Federation.<sup>19</sup>

Although the standing committees do not issue compulsory acts, their decisions and recommendations to the various state bodies are backed by the high authority of the Supreme Soviets and are, in fact, invariably implemented. In practice, there has never been a case of any state body to which a standing committee had made recommendations refusing to act on them on the grounds that the recommendations were not binding.

The republican higher state bodies supervise the execution of the proposals and criticism made by standing committees. Thus, the Presidiums of the republican Supreme Soviets issue special ordinances on the current state of implementing criticism and proposals of standing committees and of deputies made at republican Supreme Soviet session. The ordinances note the prompt implementation of criticism by republican ministries and departments. They further make a note of the particular ministries and departments that have not yet taken appropriate steps to implement the committees' recommendations, and outline specific measures for resolving the issues put by the standing committees.

The particular tasks of every committee determine the way each one operates. The Credentials Committee, for instance, verifies the credentials of every deputy and reports

its findings to its Supreme Soviet, presents its conclusions to a procurator or a court of law on the impeachment of a deputy. It makes a preliminary study of all petitions to the Presidium from enterprises and organisations on the recall of deputies to the republican Supreme Soviet and verifies their legality. In some Union Republics like Uzbekistan the Credentials Committee has also to check on the way deputies discharge their duties. The Legislative Proposals Committees are largely responsible for preparing legislation. Other standing committees operate in special fields within the competence of the republican Supreme Soviets.

Every standing committee therefore has its own sphere of activity clearly defined by the Supreme Soviet and, at the same time, is on an equal legal footing with all other standing committees. Each of them enjoys the right equally to initiate legislation.<sup>20</sup> They may demand materials and documents from republican ministries, government departments, institutions and officials.<sup>21</sup> And they can summon before them, where necessary, members of state administrative bodies.<sup>22</sup>

The need to summon members of state administrative bodies may arise either during preliminary preparation of questions or while exercising control over the implementation of laws; in which case, the committees have the right to demand from republican ministerial and departmental heads information and explanations on reasons of the non-implementation of certain laws and other enforceable enactments. This right emanates from the powers of the supreme republican state body in exercising control over the activity of republican bodies accountable to it. To the extent, therefore, that the Supreme Soviet can resolve any issue that comes within the sovereign rights and competence of the Union Republic, the committees enjoy the right to demand information and explanations both from republican bodies and from local executive bodies, organisations and enterprises, and also from various officials.<sup>23</sup>

To enhance the authority of the standing committees in discharging their duties, they have permission to call in for consultation specialists from all economic and cultural spheres.<sup>24</sup> These rights give them every opportunity to do their job properly.



How is the work of the republican Supreme Soviet standing committees run? The massive five-storey building in Moscow's central thoroughfare, Marx Prospekt, belongs to the RSFSR Supreme Soviet Presidium and it is there that its standing committees normally conduct their business. Here, for example, members of the committees gathered on the eve of the sixth session of the seventh Russian Federation Supreme Soviet. They had important business ahead: they were to ratify the 1970 RSFSR economic draft plan, the Russian Federation Budget and the report on budgetary fulfilment for 1968.

Republican planning and finance bodies at all levels—from district up to the Planning Commission and the Finance Ministry—spend many months compiling the economic plan and budget. When the drafts are ready, they pass them to the republican government, which studies them, makes corrections and additions. Finally, the plan and budget are born and presented to the republican Supreme Soviet.

Since sessions meet for only a few days, it might seem that deputies have scarcely enough time to make a thorough analysis of each section of the plan and budget. In reality, the session is only the concluding stage. Before the Supreme Soviet opens, deputies put in a great deal of preparatory work in the standing committees—that applies equally to budget, plan, draft legislation or any important Supreme Soviet resolution.

On that occasion the committee began its usual work of examining draft plans and budgets. Members of the Planning and Budget Committee and branch committees of the RSFSR Supreme Soviet gathered in a chamber in the building on Marx Prospekt. There were 286 people present. K. Gerasimov, Chairman of the RSFSR State Planning Commission and I. Fadeyev, republican Finance Minister, reported on economic plans and the budget. The deputies had come to the meeting well-prepared by their work on the draft plan and budget and already familiar with the main sections. Many had important questions they wished to put. The reports were followed by exhaustive work in the committee, heated arguments with ministerial and departmental representatives, a keen study of suggestions from the localities, and an examination of their own conclusions;

shortly the Soviet was to be in session and committee members were to give their opinion of the documents provided by the republican government.

By tradition, the Planning and Budget Committee and the branch committees set up sub-committees presided over by its members in order to examine various aspects of the plan and the budget. They normally comprise deputies of the republican Supreme Soviet, who are not on the Planning and Budget Committee or a branch committee, representatives of the RSFSR State Planning Commission, the republican Finance Ministry and other ministries and departments, economic experts and scientists. The sub-committees hear reports from ministerial, departmental and other officials and then present their conclusions to the parent committees on the various aspects of the economic plan and budget, the finance plan and estimates of the RSFSR ministries and departments, budgets of the Autonomous Republics and local budgets; they also examine proposals and petitions, make recommendations on any necessary corrections to the state plan and budget, note shortcomings in the work of particular bodies, and study reasons for non-payment of proceeds to the budget. On all these questions the sub-committees make reports and present them to the Planning and Budget Committee.

The final meetings of the Planning and Budget Committee and the branch committees were attended by members of relevant ministries, departments and local Soviet executive committees, who debated the sub-committees' findings. Day after day, they went over every figure in the 1970 republican draft economic plan and in the 1970 Russian Federation draft budget. Then came the first correction, a second and a third. . . . Finally they arrived at the revenue figure for the republican budget of 36,690,000 rubles, which was earmarked for expenditure on major repairs of school buildings, children's institutions, colleges and universities and technical schools under the jurisdiction of the RSFSR Ministry of Higher and Secondary Specialised Education, cultural and educational establishments, hospitals, old people's and invalids' homes, on the running costs of medical, cultural and educational establishments and for acquiring equipment for them, and on providing concerts for the rural population. The standing committees indicated possible sources of accu-

mulating that sum, namely allocations from state enterprise profits.

Discussions in the committees were keen and principled; the issues were complicated and differences of opinion were inevitable. It was here that deputies strove to reach agreement on the most vexed and enigmatic issues, so that when the matter went to the Supreme Soviet it would not take up too much time and deputies could promptly resolve all the items on their agenda. After careful discussion, the committees drew up its conclusions on the draft 1970 plan and state budget. The concluding report took detailed consideration of suggested amendments to the drafts, made critical remarks directed at individual ministries and departments, indicated the need for stricter economy in spending state funds and for removing any deficiencies in the financial and economic business of enterprises, organisations and establishments in the republic. They instructed their representative to make a co-report on the economic plan and state budget at the session. At the same time, they approved the text of the co-report which contained the main conclusions and suggestions of the committees.

Those are the general outlines of the work of the RSFSR Planning and Budget Committee and branch committees. They are typical for other standing committees of other republican Supreme Soviets, which have considerable autonomy in tackling intra-organisational problems inasmuch as they allocate duties among their members, set up sub-committees, working and editorial groups, approve plans for their work, and establish the best methods of resolving their problems.

Standing committees operate practically uninterruptedly; they regularly hold meetings which their chairmen summon when the need arises. The meetings are valid when no fewer than two-thirds of the committee members are present. Decisions are taken by a simple majority. Deputies who are not on the committees may participate with voice but no vote. Every meeting invites a large number of spokesmen from central and local state bodies, mass organisations and specialist groups.

The purpose of the meetings is to discuss and finally approve all suggestions and other documents which the committees are to put before the various agencies, to discuss the

results of checks and investigations that have been made, to hear information and reports from state department heads and information on progress in implementing the committees' proposals, and to resolve problems of organisation.

Between standing committee sessions, their work is continued by sub-committees and various working groups and delegated members. They set up the sub-committees and include in their composition not merely deputies on the committee, but also other deputies, representatives of state agencies, mass organisations and research workers. Their job is to examine a specific issue that the committee is studying or even part of a specific issue. Their business procedure mainly follows that of the parent committee. At their meetings they hear the views of various officials and experts, study and summarise material handed them by standing committees and state bodies, and arrange an all-round exchange of opinion on the question under review. Final proposals in the name of each committee, however, are approved only at its plenary meetings, which also hear reports from the sub-committees on their findings and examine the material submitted by them.

When the sub-committees or committees want to carry out specific instructions as, for example, preparing information, articles or sections of draft legislation, drawing up proposals or seeing that committee recommendations are effected, they set up working groups of committee members or other interested parties. Editorial groups are also frequently formed and given the job of the general editing of documents when they are ready. After going through the stage of working and editorial groups, the documents then go forward to the corresponding committee or sub-committee.

The work of the standing committees continues during sessions of the Supreme Soviet, when they are largely responsible for making reports and co-reports before the Soviet; these sum up the extensive state work of committee members who have carefully studied draft legislation or some other question.

Because of their permanent nature, the standing committees ensure continuity of the major functions of the Supreme Soviet, i.e., legislation and control of the work of various republican state bodies. The republican Supreme Soviets



regularly supervise the work of their auxiliary organs and give them specific instructions for improvement.

Besides the standing committees, Supreme Soviets can also set up interim commissions: investigatory, auditing, editorial, etc. They differ from standing committees in that they operate only until they have completed the task set them.

#### PRESIDIUM OF THE SUPREME SOVIET OF THE UNION REPUBLIC

As with the USSR Supreme Soviet, the sessional nature of the work of the Union republican Supreme Soviets necessitates a body of authority in the state apparatus of each republic which can deal with important administrative business during the period between Supreme Soviet sessions. This job is done by the republican Supreme Soviet Presidium which functions uninterruptedly from the moment it is elected by the Supreme Soviet until the formation of a new Presidium by a newly-elected Supreme Soviet.

Every Union Republic has its own way of structuring its Presidium. The Russian Federation, for example, includes vice-presidents for all sixteen Autonomous Republics within its Supreme Soviet Presidium. The Georgian and Azerbaijanian Supreme Soviet Presidiums adhere to the same principle of national representation, while the Uzbek and Kazakh Supreme Soviet Presidiums have three vice-presidents each, and all other republics two.

The number of members also varies: 7 in Latvia and Estonia, 9 in Azerbaijan and Armenia, 11 in Kirghizia, Lithuania, Tajikistan and Turkmenia, 13 in Georgia, Moldavia and Uzbekistan, 14 in the RSFSR, and 15 in the Ukraine, Byelorussia and Kazakhstan.

In its capacity as the supreme state body in the republic, the Supreme Soviet Presidium enjoys extensive powers, most of which are concerned with the business of the republican Supreme Soviet. It draws up and ratifies the Election Regulations for the republican Supreme Soviet, names an election date not exceeding two months after the Supreme Soviet has run its course; it forms constituencies, affirms the composition of the Central Electoral Commission, and establishes the standards of electoral documentation. In pursuance of the republican constitution, it summons sessions of

its Supreme Soviet, presides over and co-ordinates the entire work relating to sessional preparations. Between sessions it maintains daily contact with deputies and extends them assistance to perform their duties.

Further, it co-ordinates the work of standing committees and, in certain cases, directly instructs them to formulate draft legislation. Alternatively it may present them with bills or proposals on legislative matters which have come before the Supreme Soviet. When necessary, it requests the measured opinion of its standing committees on questions within its competence. In turn, they, too, often put their own proposals before the Presidium.

The Presidium is also responsible for publishing laws and other enactments adopted by the republican Supreme Soviet. It issues the *Vedomosti (Gazette) of the Republican Supreme Soviet* and verbatim reports of its sessions.

Of special significance are the Presidium's powers for dealing with issues that simultaneously fall within the competence of the republican Supreme Soviet. These include making partial amendments to republican legislation, relieving individual government and Supreme Court members of their duties and appointing new members, and setting up and transforming administrative agencies in the republic. What is important about these powers is, first, that they are exercised exclusively between Supreme Soviet sessions and, second, that all decisions have to be ratified subsequently by the republican Supreme Soviet to which the Presidium is accountable and subordinate in everything it does. These powers also include interpreting republican laws, conducting a national referendum, appointing and recalling republican diplomats abroad, receiving letters of credence and recall of foreign diplomatic representatives accredited to it.

Moreover, the Presidium exercises control over the activity of supreme executive and administrative republican bodies, and guidance of local Soviets. Its competence embraces the acceptance of aliens residing in the republic as republican citizens, and the right of pardon for citizens convicted by the republican judicial bodies. It establishes and confers republican titles of honour, certificates of good work and certain USSR orders and medals on behalf of the USSR Supreme Soviet Presidium as, for example, the Motherhood Glory Order (awarded to mothers who have borne and

raised 7, 8 or 9 children), and the Motherhood Medal (awarded to mothers who have borne and raised 5 or 6 children).

It performs several important organisational functions concerned with the holding of elections to the USSR Supreme Soviet and local Soviets. In regard to the former it confirms the composition of the republican electoral commission for elections to the Soviet of Nationalities, and of the constituency electoral commissions (in republics that do not have regional divisions) for elections to the Soviet of the Union and the Soviet of Nationalities. In regard to the latter, it approves the Election Regulations, establishes the form of electoral documentation and ratifies the composition of several electoral commissions.

The Presidium takes a number of measures relating to the organisation and activity of republican judicial bodies. It affirms the Regulations for elections to district and town people's courts, appoints the polling day, affirms the form of electoral documents and the Statute on the prompt recall of judges and people's assessors.

The republican Presidium issues ordinances and resolutions on matters that come within its competence. It performs its functions as a collegial body that assembles regularly in meetings called by its President whenever he deems it necessary, but usually once every month or six weeks. The meetings take place mainly between Supreme Soviet sessions, but they may overlap. Each of them is preceded by enormous preparatory work superintended by the President and Secretary. Republican government and departments, Supreme Soviet standing committees and the Presidium's own personnel prepare materials for the meetings. This preparatory work involves Supreme Soviet deputies, local Soviets, mass organisations and, in republics that contain autonomous formations, agencies of authority of Autonomous Republics, Autonomous regions and National areas. While formulating questions for meetings, Presidium members and its staff, deputies, public personalities and experts make surveys of the economic, social and cultural sectors. They often turn over their materials for discussion and invite the opinions of local Soviets and research establishments.

This circumspect preparation is combined with a business-like approach in conducting the meetings. Reports and co-

reports are made on the most important and complex matters and, depending on the items under discussion, the meeting hears reports from the republican Council of Ministers Chairman and Vice-Chairmen, ministers and departmental heads, Supreme Court Chairman, the republican Procurator, chairmen of local Soviet executive committees, Supreme Soviet standing committee members, and leading officials of mass organisations. The Presidium decides all questions on an open vote and by a simple majority.

The Presidium also holds meetings outside the republican capital—in district centres or other towns. This enables its members to make on-the-spot surveys, strengthen Presidium relations with local bodies and the public, and encourages greater publicity for its work.

Its business is not, however, confined to preparing and conducting meetings. Between Presidium meetings and Supreme Soviet sessions, Presidium Presidents, their Vice-Presidents and members continue their multifaceted organisational and supervisory activity, thereby ensuring continuity in the Presidium's work of supreme guidance. By its sheer volume, the Presidium's day-to-day guidance of local Soviets takes up a large part of its time. The President, his Vice-Presidents and the Presidium Secretary directly and through the Presidium apparatus maintain constant contact with local Soviet executive committees and decide current organisational problems of guiding these Soviets. Presidium members and employees often take trips to the localities to study the work of the Soviets and do what they can to have the best experience adopted everywhere.

The republican Presidiums maintain the closest and most direct contacts with the public at large. They pay a great deal of attention to protecting their interests and meeting their legitimate demands. Many Soviet citizens appeal to them on the most divergent of issues both personally and by post. In fact, each Presidium has a special Reception Office which copes with all complaints and applications from the public. Those which do not require further investigation are dealt with on the spot, but others may have to be forwarded to the relevant state institutions for verification and for the necessary steps to be taken. Often Presidium staff members may themselves go directly to investigate the source of the complaint or application. If citizens apply in person, they



may be received by the Presidium President and his Vice-Presidents, as the following example from Azerbaijan shows.

The Azerbaijan Supreme Soviet and its Presidium are housed in a rather austere building in the centre of Baku, the republican capital. It attracts a great number of visitors: some come when they are in trouble, some bring suggestions and opinions on various public matters, others come to take part in discussions.

The working day of the Presidium President is normally packed: that particular morning he was due to receive Arab trade union officials. Meanwhile, his sections were getting ready for a conference which the President was due to hold a little later. The Presidium was scheduled to debate the draft Statute on rural and township Soviets drawn up by the USSR Supreme Soviet Presidium.

Professor A. Guliyev, Director of the Institute of History of the Azerbaijanian Academy of Sciences, was in the Reception Office waiting for the end of the daily "flying meeting" devoted to brief reports by Presidium staff workers. Professor Guliyev, head of the toponymical commission set up by the Presidium, came to tell the President his views on renaming an ancient Azerbaijanian town.

A day rarely passes without any unplanned interviews with visitors. But that day the Presidium President was holding a reception, and people had come to him with their complaints and requests for a variety of reasons. True, some of them might well have been dealt with in the localities. Since they were there, however, they could not be despatched without a reply. The reply is not always to their liking. After all, some requests are quite unfounded and, in such cases, the President gives a full explanation to the visitor why his request cannot be met.

Besides bringing complaints, people also come with criticism and suggestions. They may not be implemented at once, but as long as they are valuable, they will sooner or later find their way into Presidium decisions and day-to-day business.

The complicated and variegated work of the Presidium requires vast organisational and technical preparation, close ties with lower Soviet bodies, accurate statistics, and complete information on the situation in the localities. All that

is a matter for the Presidium staff assigned to various sections, including the Reception Office, the department dealing with the work of Soviets, juridical department, Presidium Office, awards section, and the department for sifting through pardon petitions.

The department dealing with Soviets prepares for the Presidium materials on the organisational and mass activity of the Soviets, extends practical help to the Soviets through disseminating information on leading experience, gives recommendations and consultations, studies and summarises practical work in preparing and conducting sessions, the business of standing committees and deputies, and public involvement. It also prepares questions concerning the elections and changes in administrative and territorial divisions, and analyses information and statistics. The department instructors and consultants in charge of groups of regions and districts maintain constant contact with local republican Soviets and help improve work in the localities. After studying and summarising the experience of the Soviets, the department prepares and sends out informational surveys, bulletins, and information on the work of the local Soviets and on the progress of public activity.

The juridical department prepares all the documents needed for the Presidium's legal business, has a hand in drawing up the draft legislation that the Presidium puts before the Supreme Soviet, and gives legal advice to the standing committees and juridical information on various issues. It ensures that acts of administrative bodies and local authorities conform with the republican Constitution, laws and Presidium ordinances, and it is concerned with the codification and systematisation of republican legislation.

The Presidium Office is responsible for the organisational and technical side of the Presidium's work and that of its staff. It also deals with correspondence, office work, the archives, finance and economic services.

Amid the Presidium's auxiliary apparatus is a special editorial group responsible for publishing the *Gazette of the Union Republican Supreme Soviet*. The *Gazette* is published in the language of the republic and announces laws and other enactments of the republican Supreme Soviet, Presidium enactments, and enactments of USSR supreme bodies. The Presidium Secretary bears responsibility for publishing

all these enactments, while the editorial group prepares for publication bulletins of meetings of the republican Supreme Soviet and verbatim reports of its sessions.

#### LEGISLATIVE AND SUPERVISORY FUNCTIONS OF THE REPUBLICAN SUPREME SOVIETS

Because it is the sole representative body of the entire republic, the republican Supreme Soviet is the chief vehicle of the sovereign will of the people and major instrument for the realisation of that plenitude of power. The wide-ranging activity of the Supreme Soviet serves the interests of the people and is the most vivid expression of the genuinely representative character of the Supreme Soviets.

Their principal business is concerned with legislation and supreme state control; high among their legislative priorities are the republican state economic plan and state budget that are annually adopted by the Supreme Soviets. Every republic's economic plan depends on its economic conditions and capabilities and is intended to ensure the consolidation and improvement of economic ties with other republics, and to make the maximum contribution to the national effort.

Growth indices comprise an integral part of the plan inasmuch as they set their sights on raising general living standards and improving public services and amenities.

The budget provides the finance for realising the plan and allots money for improving republican industry, agriculture, transport and other branches of the economy, for raising living standards and culture, and for maintaining the state bodies, administration and the courts.

Here is one example of expenditure: 11,027,193,000 rubles were allotted in 1970 in accordance with the State Budget Law of the Ukraine; of that sum the following amounts were spent:<sup>25</sup>

(i) On financing the economy—heavy industry, building industry, light and food industry, agriculture, transport, provision of residential accommodation and amenities, and other economic sectors . . . . . 4,146,448,000 rubles;

(ii) On social and cultural needs—general and technical schools, colleges and universities, research institutions, voca-

tional schools, libraries, clubs, theatres, broadcasting and other educational and cultural facilities, hospitals, nurseries, sanatoria and other health and sports institutions, pensions and benefits . . . . . 6,466,435,000 rubles;

(iii) On maintaining organs of state power, state administrative bodies and the courts . . . . . 209,031,000 rubles.

The republican state budgets receive their incomes mainly from state enterprises and co-operatives. In the above-mentioned budget, for example, this source of income comprised 9,710,599,000 rubles, i.e., approximately 90 per cent of all revenue.

Besides the plan and budget laws, the republican Supreme Soviets have passed many other legislative enactments relating to economic, social and cultural matters in the republics, improving their state bodies and codifying their criminal, civil and other legislation. Recent years, particularly, have seen an upsurge in legislation. Between 1957 and 1960 the republican Supreme Soviets adopted a number of legislative enactments concerning the activity of the Soviets. They ratified Statutes on their standing committees<sup>26</sup>, and adopted laws on the procedure for recalling Supreme Soviet deputies and local Soviet deputies.<sup>27</sup> All republics had laws passed on their budgetary powers and those of local Soviets.<sup>28</sup> These laws ensure, on the one hand, the sovereign rights of the Union Republics and the rights of local Soviets and, on the other, the unity of the budgetary system and the fiscal policy of the Soviet state as a whole.

The Union Republics adopted new criminal and criminal procedure codes in 1959-61<sup>29</sup> in order to consolidate the system of legality and improve every aspect of Soviet democracy. In the same period, they passed a number of laws on the judicial system,<sup>30</sup> setting out the aims and tasks of socialist justice and the structure of the judiciary in each Union Republic. In 1958-62 they approved statutes on the legal profession,<sup>31</sup> clarifying certain key points concerning the organisation and activity of the bar in the republics.

Furthermore, they all adopted laws on nature conservation,<sup>32</sup> specifying objects of nature protection—the land, its resources, waters, forests, animals, resorts, rare natural objects and the atmosphere. Steps were taken for nature protection and certain obligations were undertaken by state



administrative agencies, economic organisations and ordinary citizens; the public was drawn into the campaign for nature preservation. In 1963-64, all Union Republics passed new civil and civil procedure codes.<sup>33</sup> In subsequent years the republican Supreme Soviets adopted laws on rural and township Soviets<sup>34</sup> and also codes on marriage and the family,<sup>35</sup> land codes,<sup>36</sup> corrective labour codes<sup>37</sup> and some other laws.

By regulating major issues in republican affairs through legislation, the Union Republics are able to combine the interests of the entire Soviet state with their own and to take account of their specific economic conditions, historical development and ethnic composition.

How these questions are dealt with in practice may be illustrated from the laws passed by the Supreme Soviet of Turkmenia. The republic's Criminal Code fully accords with the Fundamentals of Criminal Legislation of the USSR and the Union Republics. At the same time, however, it embodies the peculiarities of Turkmenian life and culture. Article 106 of the Turkmenian Criminal Code, for example, which defines aggravating circumstances for premeditated murder includes murder committed on the grounds of former attitudes to women. Point 10 of the same Article defines responsibility for premeditated murder committed on the grounds of blood vengeance. This, too, is a vestige of tribal customs.

Art. 145 of the Turkmenian Criminal Code establishes responsibility for preventing others from exercising their right to education. This, too, has its roots in the past when Turkmenian girls and women were not permitted to attend school. Since then a real cultural revolution has swept across Turkmenia and today thousands of Turkmenian girls are studying in school, college and university. The chapter on economic offences also bears the imprint of local conditions. It includes, for example, such *corpora delicti* as unauthorised taking of water (Art. 188) and wilful damage to irrigation installations (Art. 140) playing as they do such a vital part in the republic's economy.

Other legislation also bears witness to Turkmenian idiosyncrasies: the law on Turkmenian judiciary takes account of the republic's national composition, so that while court proceedings will generally be conducted in Turkmenian, they

will be in Russian, Uzbek or Kazakh in areas with predominantly Russian, Uzbek or Kazakh populations; moreover, anyone not speaking the language of the court will have the right to an interpreter and to address the court in his native tongue (Art. 10).

The whole point of republican Supreme Soviet legislation is to ensure successful economic and cultural development, the all-round improvement of material welfare, and the safeguarding of public order, legitimate rights and interests of all persons. Popular participation in making laws is one of the most manifest examples of the close ties between the legislature and the people. It is encouraged by frequently publishing drafts of the most important laws in the press for nation-wide discussion before they come before the republican Supreme Soviets. By decision of the RSFSR Supreme Soviet Presidium, for example, the Draft Law on RSFSR Judiciary, presented by the republic's Council of Ministers, was published in the press for extensive preliminary discussion. The same happened with the Criminal, Criminal Procedure, Civil and Civil Procedure Codes of the RSFSR and several other bills.

All this draft legislation met with enormous public response and many observations and proposals were sent in to the RSFSR Supreme Soviet and various state bodies. They all received careful attention and some were incorporated into the bills. Analogous public debates take place in other republics. In Byelorussia, for example, the public has discussed many normative acts as well as such paramount enactments as republican law codes. During the public debate on draft statutes on local Soviets, over three thousand observations and suggestions were sent in, many of which found their way into the final version of these statutes.

Popular involvement in republican Supreme Soviet law-making is one of the most striking manifestations of socialist democracy inherent in all their work.

Today, the exchange of experience is a salient feature of legislation in all republics. This is attributable not merely to the need for a uniform decision on many intricate problems regulated by legislation, but also to choosing the best means for resolving legal problems. If a republican body makes a careful study of the experience and practice of its own republic linked to that of others it can select the most

correct, optimal variant of legal regulation of the specific social relations. Republican Supreme Soviets have frequently paid attention to this important factor.

"All Soviet peoples are united in their common aim of building communism, in a common socialist economic system, fraternal assistance and the consistently popular nature of state authority in the USSR as a whole and in every republic," Deputy K. I. Lukashev said at the third session of the sixth Byelorussian Supreme Soviet. "From the early years of Soviet government, this unity brought similarity and, to a large extent, an identity of resolutions, decrees and laws passed in the Union Republics. Thus, the 1923 Byelorussian Civil Code is very similar to that of the RSFSR and the Ukraine for 1922. Yet this did not detract from the sovereignty of our republic since the question of sovereignty is not directly related to the way a nation exercises its full power, what laws it passes, whose experience it utilises or whose formulations it considers expedient to employ."<sup>38</sup>

Exchange of legislative experience among republics takes many forms. They exchange wide-ranging information, normative and other materials, scientists and experts. The Russian Federation, biggest of all the republics, has an important part to play in this since it possesses the largest body of scientific workers and specialists in many fields of knowledge. One look at the agenda of sessions of the Supreme Soviets, meetings of their Presidiums and standing committees shows what powerful influence inter-republican exchanges have on the formulation and settlement of legal questions. An item debated in one republic is accepted, if there are grounds for so doing, for examination in another republic. In many cases there occurs a wave of discussion of certain questions or acceptance of legislation in all the Union Republics.

Recently, all-Union state bodies, particularly the USSR Supreme Soviet Presidium, have played an important part in arranging exchange of experience among the republics.

At the request of Supreme Soviet Presidiums, a preliminary consultation is held in Moscow or in the relevant republic on republican draft legislation, with the participation of scientists, experts and members from interested government

departments. The consultations greatly help republican officials to improve their draft legislation benefiting from the experience of other republics, to recommend specific ways of resolving issues that have nation-wide importance, and to see that republican drafts conform with operative USSR legislation.

Recommendations made during consultations are especially important for further work on the republican drafts, as has been frequently pointed out at republican Supreme Soviet sessions. Turkmenian deputies made particular use of this when they adopted new Civil and Civil Procedure Codes in December 1963.

A speaker at the second session of the sixth Kazakh Supreme Soviet made the point that after adopting the first RSFSR Soviet Civil Code, the All-Russia Central Executive Committee made a friendly gesture in 1922 to governments of the Soviet republics that they might opt for the RSFSR Code. This gesture drew a lively response everywhere and it was not long before all the republican codes were collated with that of the RSFSR.

The legislative procedure employed in the republican Supreme Soviets is simple and democratic. As in the USSR Supreme Soviet, it consists in introducing a bill, examining it, then adopting and publishing the law. Republican committees, deputies, the Supreme Soviet Presidium, Council of Ministers and Supreme Court all enjoy the right to introduce bills to the Supreme Soviet.

The republican Supreme Soviets exercise supreme state control over the territory within their jurisdiction. They supervise the implementation of their own laws and decisions and the enactments of USSR state bodies, and they study the various economic and cultural situation in their republics. There was a time (1938-55) when the Supreme Soviets heard annual republican governmental reports on the execution of state budgets, and Presidium reports on ordinances they had adopted and put before the Supreme Soviet for ratification. More recently, however, the situation has radically altered. Now it is widely common for ministers and other republican administrative heads to give details on the situation in their respective economic areas, and report on the implementation by ministries and departments of the enactments passed by USSR state bodies and republican Supreme Soviets.



To take just one example, the fifth Turkmenian Supreme Soviet examined the position and ameliorating measures of medical service and health protection in the republic, of implementing the law "On Strengthening the Ties Between School and Real Life and Further Developing the System of Education in Turkmenia", and a number of other questions. At its sixth convocation, it considered ways of improving public services, of increasing the rate and quality of cotton sowing; it took stock of the progress being made in the republican economic plan, considered how far the collective and state farms had fulfilled their socialist obligations in producing cotton and other farm products, and considered steps it might take to improve rural living and cultural standards.

The seventh Supreme Soviet of the Turkmenian Republic studied, among others, new measures for improving social services in the republic, the results of the republic's economic development plan for 1969; it considered the commitments taken by workers of enterprises and organisations in socialist emulation in connection with the Lenin centenary; reviewed measures for further improving trade operations, and the results of the implementation of the republic's Law on Nature Conservation.<sup>39</sup> The respective ministers reported on these questions. The republican Supreme Soviet passed decision on each question under review.

Ministers in charge of all the relevant republican ministries made reports on these items and the republican Supreme Soviet passed a resolution on every issue.

The republican Supreme Soviets, namely, Latvia and Uzbekistan, at their seventh convocation, surveyed communal services; cultural institutions and organisations responsible for the preservation of monuments (namely, the Ukraine, Azerbaijan and Lithuania), health (Uzbekistan), increasing production and improving the quality of consumer goods (RSFSR), overall promotion of the economy and culture (Estonia) and the work of local Soviets (Georgia, Kirghizia, Uzbekistan and Moldavia), and so on.

Of late the republican Supreme Soviets have more frequently considered reports of republican governments on all manner of questions appertaining to their activity.

Deputies' questions are an important means that the Supreme Soviets have of controlling government activity.

They may be addressed either to the government or to individual ministries. Constitutions require that the government or minister to whom the question is made has to provide an oral or written reply in the Supreme Soviet within three weeks. These questions touch on all manner of governmental and ministerial activity. Uzbek deputies, for example, put the following questions to the ministers during the economic plan and budget debate. A question to the Uzbek Building Materials Minister came from I. Jalilov from Karshi and K. Umarov from Ferghana. The former was concerned that work on the Karshi steppe was being hampered by lack of building materials; the latter expressed concern that Ferghana villages were behind schedule in building hospitals, schools and houses, similarly for want of building materials.

The Minister replied that although the industry had received new plant for manufacturing a whole range of building materials, this was quite insufficient. He complained to the Supreme Soviet about departments and local Soviets who were holding up, for example, the allocation of land plots for new building materials plants.

A question to the Minister of Agriculture came from two deputies, M. Nadyrkhanova, a doctor from Bukhara, and S. Yusupov, a business executive from Tashkent. They wished to know what the Ministry of Agriculture and its Minister were doing about increasing the potato and other vegetable crops. In his reply the Minister stated that it was intended to double the yield by using areas around Tashkent for growing vegetables, concentrating potatoes in certain other regions, building hothouses over an area of 59 hectares, and extending the "winter orchards" in the south of the republic so that vegetables would start arriving in March.

All the questions and their replies evoked lively debate in the republican Supreme Soviet.

Another measure of control that the republican Supreme Soviets have is their enquiry and auditing commissions which they can appoint on any question. Pursuant to the republican Constitutions, all institutions and officials are duty bound to fulfil the requirements of these commissions and hand over to them all materials requested.

# NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> *Pravda*, June 20, 1971.
- <sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>6</sup> *Pervaya sessiya Verkhovnogo Sovieta Turkmenskoi SSR. Stenografichesky otchot (First Session of the Turkmenian Supreme Soviet, Verbatim Report)*. Turkmenizdat, 1940, p. 35.
- <sup>7</sup> *Itogi vyborov i sostav deputatov Verkhovnykh Sovietov soyuznykh i avtonomnykh respublik. 1967. Statistichesky Sbornik (Election Results and Composition of Deputies to Union and Autonomous Republican Supreme Soviets. 1967. Statistical Handbook)*. Izvestia Publishers, 1967, pp. 22-23.
- <sup>8</sup> *Pervaya sessiya Verkhovnogo Sovieta Turkmenskoi SSR. Stenografichesky otchot (First Session of the Turkmenian Supreme Soviet, Verbatim Report)*. Turkmenizdat, 1940, p. 34.
- <sup>9</sup> *Zasedaniye Verkhovnogo Sovieta Turkmenskoi SSR chetvoryotogo sozyva [pervaya sessiya]. Stenografichesky otchot (Meeting of the Supreme Soviet of the Turkmenian Republic of the Fourth Convocation [First Session], Verbatim Report)*. Turkmenizdat, Ashkhabad, 1955, p. 145.
- <sup>10</sup> *Turkmenskaya Iskra*, April 13, 1967.
- <sup>11</sup> Verbatim reports of the fourth, fifth, sixth and seventh sessions of the fifth convocation of the Estonian Supreme Soviet.
- <sup>12</sup> *Pervaya sessiya Verkhovnogo Sovieta RSFSR. Stenografichesky otchot (First Session of the RSFSR Supreme Soviet, Verbatim Report)*. M., 1938.
- <sup>13</sup> *Yubileinaya sessiya Verkhovnogo Sovieta RSFSR (Jubilee Session of the RSFSR Supreme Soviet)*. Izdaniye Verkhovnogo Sovieta RSFSR, M., 1954.
- <sup>14</sup> See, for example, Standing Orders of the Latvian Supreme Soviet in *Vedomosti Verkhovnogo Sovieta i Pravitelstva Latvinskoi SSR*, 1959, Nos. 11 and 12.
- <sup>15</sup> N. A. Gorshenyeva and A. N. Gorshenyev, *Verkhovny Soviet RSFSR (RSFSR Supreme Soviet)*, Gosyurizdat, 1955.
- <sup>16</sup> *Zasedaniya Verkhovnogo Sovieta Armyanskoi SSR sedmogo sozyva [tretaya sessiya]. Stenografichesky otchot (Meetings of the Armenian Supreme Soviet, Seventh Convocation [Third Session], Verbatim Report)*. Yerevan, 1968.
- <sup>17</sup> *Zasedaniya Verkhovnogo Sovieta Ukrainskoi SSR sedmogo sozyva [pervaya sessiya]. Stenografichesky otchot (Meetings of the Ukrainian Supreme Soviet, Seventh Convocation [First Session], Verbatim Report)*. Politizdat Ukrainy, 1967, p. 159.
- <sup>18</sup> See, for example, the Statute on Standing Committees of the Armenian Supreme Soviet in *Zasedaniya Verkhovnogo Sovieta Armyanskoi SSR sedmogo sozyva [tretaya sessiya]. Stenografichesky otchot (Meetings of*

- the Armenian Supreme Soviet, Seventh Convocation [Third Session]. Verbatim Report)*. Yerevan, 1968.
- <sup>19</sup> A. N. Vinogradov, *Verkhovny Soviet RSFSR (RSFSR Supreme Soviet)*. Yuridicheskaya literatura, M., 1967, p. 46.
- <sup>20</sup> See, for example, Art. 9 of the Statute on Standing Committees of Byelorussia.
- <sup>21</sup> Statute on Standing Committees of Uzbekistan, Part III.
- <sup>22</sup> Statute on Standing Committees of Moldavia, Art. 11, para. 'A'.
- <sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, Art. 8.
- <sup>24</sup> See, for example, Statute on Standing Committees of Kirghizia, Art. 11, para. 'B'.
- <sup>25</sup> *Vedomosti Verkhovnogo Sovieta Ukrainy*, No. 1, 1970, Item 2.
- <sup>26</sup> See, for example, *The Laws of the Moldavian SSR*, 1959, No. 1, Art. 5.
- <sup>27</sup> See, for example, the RSFSR Law "On the Procedure of Recalling a Deputy of Territory, Regional, Area, District, Town, Village and Township Soviet of Working People's Deputies of the RSFSR" in *Zasedaniya Verkhovnogo Sovieta RSFSR pyatogo sozyva [tretaya sessiya]. Stenografichesky otchot (Meeting of the RSFSR Supreme Soviet, Fifth Convocation [Third Session], Verbatim Report)*. Izdaniye Verkhovnogo Sovieta RSFSR, 1960, pp. 286-89.
- <sup>28</sup> *O byudzhetykh pravakh Soyuza SSR, soyuznykh respublik i mestnykh Sovietov deputatov trudyashchikhsya (On the Budgetary Powers of the USSR, the Union Republics and Local Soviets of Working People's Deputies)*. Gosyurizdat, M., 1963.
- <sup>29</sup> *Ugolovnoye zakonodatelstvo Soyuza SSR i soyuznykh respublik (Criminal Legislation of the USSR and Union Republics)* in two volumes, Gosyurizdat, M., 1963; and *Zakonodatelstvo ob ugolovnom sudoproizvodstve Soyuza SSR i soyuznykh respublik (Legislation on Criminal Procedure of the USSR and Union Republics)* in two volumes. Gosyurizdat, M., 1963.
- <sup>30</sup> *Zakonodatelstvo o sudoustroistve Soyuza SSR i soyuznykh respublik (Legislation on the Judicial System of the USSR and Union Republics)*. Gosyurizdat, M., 1961.
- <sup>31</sup> See, for example, Statute on the RSFSR Legal Profession in *Zasedaniya Verkhovnogo Sovieta RSFSR pyatogo sozyva [shestaya sessiya]. Stenografichesky otchot (Meetings of the RSFSR Supreme Soviet, Fifth Convocation [Sixth Session], Verbatim Report)*. Izdaniye Verkhovnogo Sovieta RSFSR, 1962, pp. 179-89.
- <sup>32</sup> See, for example, Law on Nature Conservation of the Armenian Republic in *Vedomosti Verkhovnogo Sovieta Armyanskoi SSR*, 1958, No. 6, Art. 70.
- <sup>33</sup> *Grazhdanskoye zakonodatelstvo SSSR i soyuznykh respublik (Civil Legislation of the USSR and Union Republics)*, Gosyurizdat, M., 1957; and *Grazhdansky protsessualny kodeks Latvinskoi SSR (Civil Procedural Code of the Latvian Republic)*. Licsma, Riga, 1967.
- <sup>34</sup> *Laws on Rural and Township Soviets of Working People's Deputies*, M., Izvestia Publishers, 1969.



<sup>35</sup> *Vedomosti Verkhovnogo Sovieta RSFSR*, No. 32, 1969, Clause 1086.

<sup>36</sup> *Vedomosti Verkhovnogo Sovieta RSFSR*, No. 28, 1970, Clause 581.

<sup>37</sup> *Vedomosti Verkhovnogo Sovieta RSFSR*, No. 51, 1970, Clause 1220.

<sup>38</sup> *Tretiya sessiya Verkhovnogo Sovieta Byelorusskoi SSR shestogo sozyva. Stenografichesky otchot (Third Session of the Byelorussian Supreme Soviet, Sixth Convocation. Verbatim Report)*. Minsk, 1964, p. 192.

<sup>39</sup> *Zasedaniya pervoi, pyatoi i sedmoi sessii Verkhovnogo Sovieta Turkmeniskoi SSR sedmogo sozyva. Stenograficheskiye otchoty (Meetings of the Turkmenian Supreme Soviet, Seventh Convocation, First, Fifth and Seventh Sessions. Verbatim Reports)*.

## CHAPTER 5

### THE SUPREME SOVIETS OF THE AUTONOMOUS REPUBLICS

The Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic (ASSR) is a form of state self-determination of nations. It is a socialist national state that is part of a Union Republic on autonomous principles. The people of such an autonomous republic have independent control over their internal affairs extending to both legislation and state administration.

The USSR has twenty Autonomous Republics in all, sixteen in the Russian Federation—the Bashkir, Buryat, Daghestan, Kabardino-Balkar, Kalmyk, Karelian, Komi, Mari, Mordovian, North Ossetian, Tatar, Tuvian, Udmurt, Checheno-Ingush, Chuvash and Yakut Autonomous Republics; two in Georgia—the Abkhazian and Ajarian; one in Uzbekistan—Kara-Kalpak; and one in Azerbaijan—the Nakhichevan Autonomous Republic.

Since they are the states, they have much in common with a Union Republic, possessing their own inviolable territory, which cannot be altered without their consent, and their own republican citizenship, supreme bodies of state authority and state administration and Supreme Court. They enjoy a fairly wide range of powers: to adopt their Constitution and see that it is observed; institute the division of the republic into districts, establish its district and town boundaries; legislate; safeguard law and order and civil rights and liberties; ratify the economic plan and budget and report on its implementation; approve state and local taxes, dues and levies; superintend insurance and savings; supervise republican industrial and trading enterprises and local industry; administer and control the use of land, its resources, forests and waters; take charge of housing and municipal services, house building and amenities in towns and other populated areas, road building, local transport and communications; supervise health protection, social

security primary and secondary education; control and take care of higher education; superintend cultural, educational and scientific organisations and establishments in the republic; and organise and develop physical recreation and sport.

As in the Union Republic, the Supreme Soviet is the Autonomous Republic's supreme agency of authority. It is the republic's organ of popular representation and exercises state authority in its plenitude. It is elected by the republic's citizens for a period of four years on the basis of universal, equal and direct suffrage by secret balloting.

The Constitutions of the Autonomous Republics provide for different rates of representation to the Supreme Soviets, since they all have different size populations and areas. The Bashkir and Tatar ASSRs, for example, elect 1 deputy for every 15,000 people, the Mordovian and Chuvash 1 for 12,000, the Buryat, Komi, Mari and Daghestan 1 for 6,000, North Ossetian 1 for 4,000, the others an average of 1 for 3,000-3,500 people.

The numerical composition of Supreme Soviets also varies, as the following table reveals:<sup>1</sup>

Autonomous Republic	No. of deputies in its Supreme Soviet	Autonomous Republic	No. of deputies in its Supreme Soviet
Abkhazian	130	Mari	120
Ajarian	90	Mordovian	146
Bashkir	254	Nakhichevan	80
Buryat	137	North Ossetian	133
Daghestan	181	Tatar	207
Kabardino-Balkar	142	Tuvanian	120
Kalmyk	118	Udmurt	178
Kara-Kalpak	164	Checheno-Ingush	149
Karelian	133	Chuvash	153
Komi	156	Yakut	203

The Autonomous republican Supreme Soviets are genuinely popular representative bodies, as is evidenced by the 1971 election returns.<sup>2</sup>

Total number of deputies	of whom				
	workers	collective farmers	intellectuals	women	holders of higher or secondary education certificates
2,994	945	489	1,560	1,437	1,979

These figures show that deputies to the Supreme Soviets of the Autonomous Republics come from all walks of life, with liberal representation of workers, farmers and intellectuals. In regard to sex and education, the figures are particularly indicative since they bear witness to the tremendous advances made in the once backward outlying areas of the Russian Empire.

The ethnic make-up of their Supreme Soviets provides further evidence of their representative character. Among the 153 deputies to the Chuvash Supreme Soviet, for example, there are 105 Chuvashes, 40 Russians, 4 Ukrainians, 2 Tatars, 1 Byelorussian and 1 Jew.<sup>3</sup> Similarly, of the 203 deputies to the Yakut Supreme Soviet there are 114 Yakuts, 69 Russians, 9 Ukrainians, 6 Evenks and Evens, 2 Chukchis, 1 Yukagir and 2 others.<sup>4</sup>

The Autonomous republican Supreme Soviets greatly resemble their Union republican counterparts in organisational structure, character and forms of activity. They are uni-cameral, they have Elders' Councils, they operate in sessions, make extensive use of standing committees, and their deputies do a great amount of work among the people. In respect to the substance and organisation of work, however, they do display certain differences relating to the specific ASSR powers, the close links between them and local bodies, and their ability to direct closer attention to local economic and cultural matters.

The Presidium summons Supreme Soviet sessions no less than twice a year. Their main work consists in formulating legislation, setting up central state agencies for the republic and superintending their activities. They issue laws on a variety of state, economic and cultural questions. The fifth and sixth Tatar Supreme Soviets, for example, adopted laws on the procedure for recalling deputies to the Tatar Supreme Soviet,<sup>5</sup> on the procedure for recalling deputies to district,



town, village and township Soviets of Working People's Deputies in the Tatar ASSR,<sup>6</sup> and on the budgetary powers of the Tatar ASSR and local Soviets.<sup>7</sup> Every year the Supreme Soviets pass laws on the economic plan and state budget for their republics.

The volume of their legislative work is considerably smaller in comparison with the work of the Union republican Supreme Soviets in settling specific issues of their administrative sectors, and in supervising the implementation of USSR and Union republican laws. When they carry out their supervisory functions, they employ basically the same methods as the Union republican Supreme Soviets do. The following Karelian example gives some idea of how this work is done.

All 133 deputies to the Karelian Supreme Soviet received copies of a government report about one month before the opening of the eighth session of the sixth convocation (1967). They, therefore, had time to think it over and discuss the various points with their constituents after they had digested the report. A fortnight before the session, members of the Karelian Supreme Soviet standing committees arrived in Petrozavodsk, the Autonomous republican capital, to check on the work of several ministries and departments and see that they had implemented the major decisions of the republican government. On the eve of the session's opening, the committees met to discuss their findings and formulate their proposals to the government. It was here in fact that they began to debate the report of the Council of Ministers and draft their decisions on it. Each committee instructed its chairman or one of its members to speak at the coming session, voice their collective opinion on the government report and introduce amendments to the Supreme Soviet's draft resolution.

The Chairman of the Republic's Council of Ministers reported back to the Supreme Soviet session. He informed deputies of the major problems the government had managed to solve in the period under review and of the tasks and prospects of economic and cultural progress in Karelia. The speaker was not sparing in his criticism both of himself and certain ministries.

The debate on the report lasted more than five hours with sixteen speeches. Three are particularly worthy of mention:

that by M. Checherova, foreman at the Petrozavodsk Knitwear Factory, A. Afanasyeva, foreman in the mica shop of the Chupin mine workings, and N. Bystranov, operator at the Suojärvi station depot. All three deputies spoke of the top priority that had to be given to the districts, towns and townships they represented. M. Checherova drew the government's attention to the need to resolve promptly certain questions relating to municipal and welfare services in the capital, and to the fact that many enterprises had for some time not built any pre-school institutions even though there was a great shortage of female labour. A. Afanasyeva opined that what the republican government and some ministries were doing was insufficient to meet the needs of distant areas within the Arctic Circle.

Many speakers viewed government activity from the standpoint of its record on implementing voters' mandates. In one way or another several deputies remarked on the style and methods of work of the republican government, individual ministries and departments. The standing committee spokesmen criticised certain aspects of the government's work and put forward their committees' practical suggestions which would, they averred, improve administration in various economic, cultural and consumer spheres.

The concluding speech was circumstantial and specific: the Chairman of the Council of Ministers replied to the written questions from deputies that had come up to him during the debate and answered the criticism and suggestions. He informed the assembly that many suggestions would be taken into consideration. The Council of Ministers would, he said, pressurise economic organisations to improve cultural and welfare services, particularly since the new economic reform enabled them to allocate more finance for that purpose. He agreed that the style and methods of governmental, ministerial and departmental work left much to be desired and that it would be improved. The government would certainly draw its practical conclusions from the session's report.

In its resolution on the Council of Ministers' report, the Karelian Supreme Soviet took note both of the good and the bad in the government's work in managing the economy and culture, and in supervising the local Soviet executive committees, outlined a programme of activity for the imme-

diate future and suggested ways and means of bettering their work.<sup>8</sup>

The Autonomous republican Supreme Soviets set up a number of higher state bodies for their corresponding republics. They appoint the republican Supreme Soviet Presidium, form the government—the ASSR Council of Ministers, and appoint the Supreme Courts of the Autonomous Republics. In preparing and conducting sessions, legislation, forming state bodies and controlling their work, they largely follow the same procedure as employed in the Union republican Supreme Soviets. But the relatively small size of the ASSR Supreme Soviets makes it particularly necessary to maintain constant contact with local Soviets and mass organisations so as to give thorough and comprehensive thought to draft laws and enactments, and to achieve the best organisation and supervision over their implementation. To these ends they hold “mobile sessions”, i.e., sessions held outside the capital, in another town or populated area whose inhabitants are especially concerned with a particular issue under review.

*Standing committees* play an important part in the work of the Autonomous republican Supreme Soviets and their deputies; they comprise committees for Legislative Proposals, Planning and Budget, Credentials, for Youth Affairs and several sectional committees. Thus, the first session of the Yakut Seventh Supreme Soviet appointed the following sectional committees: industry, transport and communications; construction and building materials industry; agriculture; health and social security; education, science and culture; welfare services, trade and public catering; nature conservation; physical recreation and sport.<sup>9</sup>

Since foreign relations do not come within the jurisdiction of Autonomous Republics, they do not have any foreign affairs committees. They have at present a total of 214 standing committees with an aggregate deputy staff of over 2,000—an average of 7 to 21 or more deputies each.

Special statutes ratified by supreme representative bodies of the corresponding republics define the powers and work procedure of the standing committees. The Statute on the Tatar Supreme Soviet Standing Committees, passed on February 18, 1958,<sup>10</sup> lays down that the Tatar Supreme Soviet should make up its standing committees from its deputies

for the duration of its powers and would consist of a chairman and 12-14 members. Presidium members and deputies who head ministries and departments whose work overlaps with that of the committees are not eligible for appointment to the committees.

The committees meet whenever necessary but not less than once every two months; they are open to all other deputies of the Tatar Supreme Soviet with voice but no vote. Decisions are taken by simple majority vote. The committees assist republican and local state bodies to implement the economic plan, improve material, cultural and welfare services, involve the public in running state affairs, reinforce law and order and implement other tasks confronting the republic.

On instructions from their Supreme Soviet, on their own initiative or on the recommendation of the Tatar Supreme Soviet Presidium, the standing committees enjoy the following rights: to investigate the work of ministries, departments and enterprises; to demand requisite information and documents from various establishments; to hear and discuss at their meetings reports from ministers and managers of factories, offices and organisations on the state of their work. They draw a wide body of workers, farmers and intellectuals into their activity, invite various economic experts for consultation and establish close contact with parallel standing committees of the local Soviets.

The committees also have the right to see that citizens abide by the republican Constitution, the laws and enactments of the USSR Supreme Soviet and of the RSFSR and Tatar ASSR Supreme Soviets, the ordinances and resolutions of the USSR Supreme Soviet Presidium and of the RSFSR and Tatar ASSR Presidiums, government enactments of the USSR, RSFSR and Tatar ASSR, and the orders and decisions of heads of institutions, enterprises and organisations of the Tatar Autonomous Republic. Standing committees of other Autonomous Republics have similar powers.

The way these committees organise their work is basically identical to that of the Union republican committees.

Presidiums are appointed by Autonomous republican Supreme Soviets from their own membership and only differ from the Union republican parallel Presidiums in size, being slightly smaller (from 11 to 15 members, as a rule). Each



Presidium has a President and a Secretary and two Vice-Presidents (except the North Ossetian ASSR which has only one Vice-President).

The Presidium issues ordinances, interprets the ASSR laws, conducts a public referendum, institutes and confers ASSR honours, summons routine and extraordinary sessions of the Supreme Soviet, appoints new elections no later than two months from the expiry date of the old Supreme Soviet, and convenes the first session of the newly-elected Supreme Soviet no later than three months after the election. The Presidium sanctions the institution of criminal proceedings against a deputy of the ASSR Supreme Soviet, or arresting him.

Other major functions of the Presidium include controlling the work of administrative bodies of the Autonomous Republic, ensuring that the Supreme Soviet and standing committees operate normally, rendering aid to deputies and guiding the local Soviets. As part of its work in supervising the implementation of legislation from Autonomous and Union republican and USSR supreme bodies, the Presidium hears reports from the heads of republican and local agencies and of other organisations functioning in the republic. It prepares the ground for Supreme Soviet sessions, guides the work of standing committees between sessions, helps to implement suggestions and critical proposals from committees and deputies, sees that the electors' mandates are carried out, and does what it can to bring deputies' reports to the notice of the electorate.

The Presidium exercises its control of local Soviets by guiding their activity, disseminating advanced experience, and seeing that they and other local institutions observe the requirements of socialist democracy and legality. To extend its ties with local bodies and the public, the Autonomous republican Presidium sometimes holds its meetings away from the capital into the interior of the republic, and its members take an active part in local government.

Presidium members receive much support from their staff and auxiliary bodies, especially the Reception Office and Organisational and Instructional Department, which extends practical assistance to local Soviets, their committees and executive committees.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> *Pravda*, June 20, 1971.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> *Zasedaniye Verkhovnogo Sovieta Chuvashskoi ASSR sedmogo sozyva [pervaya sessiya]. Stenografichesky otchot (Meeting of the Chuvash ASSR Supreme Soviet, Seventh Convocation [First Session]. Verbatim Report).* Izdaniye Verkhovnogo Sovieta Chuvashskoi ASSR, Cheboksary, 1967, p. 12.

<sup>4</sup> *Zasedaniye Verkhovnogo Sovieta Yakutskoi ASSR sedmogo sozyva [pervaya sessiya]. Stenografichesky otchot (Meeting of the Yakut ASSR Supreme Soviet, Seventh Convocation [First Session]. Verbatim Report).* Yakutskoye knizhnoye izdatelstvo, Yakutsk, 1967, p. 11.

<sup>5</sup> *Zasedaniye Verkhovnogo Sovieta Tatarskoi ASSR [tretaya sessiya]. Stenografichesky otchot (Meeting of the Tatar ASSR Supreme Soviet [Third Session]. Verbatim Report).* Izdaniye Verkhovnogo Sovieta Tatarskoi ASSR, 1960, pp. 110-12.

<sup>6</sup> As above, fifth session, 1961, pp. 106-08.

<sup>7</sup> As above, eighth session, 1962, pp. 114-35.

<sup>8</sup> *Zasedaniya Verkhovnogo Sovieta Karelskoi ASSR shestogo sozyva [vosmaya sessiya]. Stenografichesky otchot (Meetings of the Karelian ASSR Supreme Soviet, Sixth Convocation [Eighth Session]. Verbatim Report).* Karelskoye knizhnoye izdatelstvo, Petrozavodsk, 1967.

<sup>9</sup> *Zasedaniye Verkhovnogo Sovieta Yakutskoi ASSR sedmogo sozyva [pervaya sessiya]. Stenografichesky otchot (Meeting of the Yakut ASSR Supreme Soviet, Seventh Convocation [First Session]. Verbatim Report).* Yakutsk, 1967, p. 20.

<sup>10</sup> *Zasedaniya Verkhovnogo Sovieta Tatarskoi ASSR chetvyortogo sozyva [shestaya sessiya]. Stenografichesky otchot (Meetings of the Tatar ASSR Supreme Soviet, Fourth Convocation [Sixth Session]. Verbatim report).* Kazan, 1958.

## CHAPTER 6

### LOCAL GOVERNMENT

#### THE PLACE OF LOCAL SOVIETS AMONG SOVIET REPRESENTATIVE BODIES

The Soviets of Working People's Deputies constitute the local organs of state power in the territories, regions, Autonomous regions, National areas, districts, towns, townships and rural localities. Their network is defined in the 1936 Soviet Constitution and largely coincides with the administrative-territorial division of Union and Autonomous Republics inscribed in their constitutions.

The most significant fact about local Soviets is that they are the most mass and numerous representative state bodies and stand closest to the population. They operate on the universal principle of democratic centralism, i.e., within their allotted area they direct state, economic and cultural affairs, see that Soviet laws are implemented and that all the needs and requirements of the local populace are met accordingly.

They have complete authority to organise and direct local economic and cultural affairs and at the same time carry out central administrative orders and mobilise the local populace to see that they are put into effect. In all their functions they abide by the USSR Constitution, the Union and Autonomous republican constitutions, the laws and ordinances of the Supreme Soviet Presidium of the USSR and the Union and Autonomous Republics, the resolutions of the Councils of Ministers of the USSR, Union and Autonomous Republics, and all enactments of superior local administrative and governing bodies.

Just like the Supreme Soviets, the local Soviets are elected by the democratic election law and, in everything they do, they rely on the people, drawing them into state administration. By exercising state authority, the local Soviets express the popular will which is made known either directly (at meetings, in letters or in voters' instructions which form

one of the main pillars of Soviet activity) or through deputies.

They have an executive apparatus which is subordinate to them and functions under their direction and control. Moreover, their limited material and financial independence enables them to perform the tasks that fall within their competence.

The 1936 Soviet Constitution singled out two main groups of bodies from the state administrative structure: the supreme state bodies and local government bodies. In that sense, the latter exercise uniform state authority within the bounds of their own administrative units under the direction and control of Supreme Soviets (USSR, Union and Autonomous republican). But that does not make all Soviets equal subdivisions in a single structure of state powers. They are only the lower links in relation to the USSR and republican organs. When it comes to their structure and competence, they differ, some being at a higher, some at a lower level. Their legal status is dependent on the standing of the various administrative-territorial units in the general pattern of the Soviet administrative-territorial structure.

By the administrative-territorial structure, the Soviet lawyers understand a territorial division, based on the class nature, tasks and functions of the state, into parts on which the state apparatus is structured. Every type of state has its own administrative-territorial pattern corresponding to its socio-economic relations. When one set of socio-economic relations replaces another there inevitably occurs a change in the state's administrative set-up. The underlying principles of such a structure in all exploiting states are intended to ensure the most convenient government of a given territory, i.e., to make it possible to take effective administrative, fiscal, military and any other measures for protecting the interests of the dominant classes.

All the same, those principles are not everywhere employed in the same way: the state administrative set-up depends on the alignment of class forces, which varies in different periods of history and which influences the pattern of administration.

In a socialist state, the administrative-territorial structure differs radically from that of capitalist states, inasmuch as its guiding principle is to strive to implement the economic



and political tasks confronting the socialist state and to extend socialist democracy. The territorial organisation of society closely related to production is, therefore, more suited to socialist states whose principal function is the economic one of organising and running the entire economy. Within the Soviet Union this administrative set-up has been built for the good of the whole population and is entirely rational. It is organically related to the distribution of production and the settlement of people, the improvement of the state apparatus and strict observance of the Leninist national policy. When the state is determining administrative boundaries it bears in mind such factors as natural resources, the nature of the economy, direction of the means of communication, population gravitation towards particular economic centres, and the size and density of population. Further, it must consider the most rational distribution of the forces of production and future economic growth on the basis of the state plan. As Engels once put it, "Only a society which makes it possible for its productive forces to dovetail harmoniously into each other on the basis of one single vast plan can allow industry to be distributed over the whole country in the way best adapted to its own development, and to the maintenance and development of the other elements of production".<sup>1</sup> Rational location of production and its rapid development are, however, not ends in themselves, they do not override the interests of the people. On the contrary, they create conditions most conducive to the complete satisfaction of the constantly growing economic, social and cultural requirements of the community. If the administrative-territorial structure is organised properly, "...there are absolutely no technical obstacles," Lenin wrote, "to the enjoyment of the treasures of science and art, which for centuries have been concentrated in a few centres, by the whole of the population spread more or less evenly over the entire country."<sup>2</sup>

The administrative-territorial structure of all fifteen Union Republics basically corresponds to the economic and natural historical conditions of the particular parts of the country. Regional or territorial divisions normally coincide with the boundaries of economic areas within a given republic, and administrative districts are also patterned on natural and economic factors. When fixing the boundaries of administra-

tive districts the government takes into account both natural borders and the economic ties of local economic centres with adjacent territories. Rural Soviets, for example, have their boundaries usually defined by the territorial limits of their collective and state farms. Once again they do not ignore natural boundaries, population drift, direction of roads and development of communications, and, of course, the most convenient way of providing services to the population.

The principle of economic zoning underlies the Soviet administrative-territorial pattern. This presupposes, above all, the formation of administrative units as economically organised units with due account for their natural, economic and other resources and their growth prospects.

Immediately after the October 1917 Revolution, the government was faced with the problem of creating a new administrative set-up which would suit the overriding tasks of promoting the socialist economy, correctly locating the country's forces of production and encouraging their all-round growth, ensuring free national development and cementing the friendship of all Soviet peoples, drawing administrative bodies close to the populace and involving the people in running the state. But there was no immediate hope of resolving the enormous and intricate task of economic zoning. It would come gradually as the necessary experience accumulated.

The first official document proposing a new administrative-territorial structure was the declaration of the People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs "To All Soviets of Workers', Soldiers', Peasants' and Farm Labourers' Deputies" issued on December 24, 1917. It stated in part that "In relation to the question of strengthening Soviet authority in the localities it is worth considering the matter ... of altering administrative boundaries. ... The former administrative divisions of provinces (*gubernia*), *uyezds* and *volosts* are outmoded and many territories appertaining to various administrative areas have long gravitated towards one another economically.

"Drawing your attention to this, we suggest that you set to work on the practical details of this issue because the correct division into administrative areas corresponding to the economic importance of individual localities and their

economic relationships will undoubtedly put a more solid foundation under Soviet authority."<sup>3</sup>

Civil War and foreign intervention, then the difficulties of getting the country back on its feet, hampered the change-over to nation-wide zoning. Consequently, in the Soviet government's early years the old system of *gubernias*, *uyezds*, and *volosts* largely remained, with just a few minor changes necessitated by the situation. All questions of administrative boundaries were dealt with exclusively by local Soviets and, where they decided to make changes, it was usually to link economically identical zones to the appropriate natural economic, political and cultural centres and to bring the state apparatus closer to the people.

In the light of these changes the number of administrative units in the country had increased by late 1920 and early 1921: *gubernias* by 29, *uyezds* by 134 and *volosts* by 4,442 over pre-revolutionary figures.<sup>4</sup>

The transition to peaceful socialist construction required a radical overhaul of the administrative-territorial structure; but that had to be preceded by economic zoning, for only a rational division of the country into economic zones could be a sound base for a proper administrative set-up.

Administrative districts are smaller than the major economic areas and are, in fact, their component parts. The economic area comprises, as a rule, a group of territories, regions, Autonomous Republics and Autonomous regions. Their boundaries are inviolable. Both economic areas and administrative districts are formed on the basis of uniform economic and national principles.

The well-known GOELRO plan divided the country into eight economic areas: North, South, Caucasus, Urals, Central-Industrial, Volga, Turkestan and West Siberia. All the work in creating a new administrative set-up at that time was focussed on these divisions.

A Zoning Commission attached to the State Planning Commission came into being in March 1921 and soon made a report on the economic zoning of Russia which laid out the chief principles of economic zoning and outlined the new administrative map. It suggested setting up 22 economic areas based on the production principle. Each area, the authors surmised, would be an integrated production unit, an independent economic organism which would operate in close

contact with other areas on the basis of rational division of labour.

The country's new pattern was to be *oblast—okrug—raion* (region-area-district). Without going into unnecessary detail, suffice it to say that at that time the government experts elaborated a new country-wide division into economic areas and a new administrative-territorial set-up.

The change-over to economic zoning and the completely new administrative-territorial pattern occurred somewhat later, when industrialisation and collectivisation got underway. With the role of local Soviets vastly increasing in socialist construction it was becoming imperative to complete zoning as swiftly as possible.

By the end of 1927 the new administrative structure extended over most of the Russian Federation and was growing apace in the other republics. By early 1930 it covered the whole of the country. Regions and territories were introduced only in the RSFSR, elsewhere the divisions were areas and districts. Furthermore, some regions and territories—from among those that had existed earlier and had been very large administrative units in area and population—had areas subdivided into districts, while other regions had no areas. It has to be borne in mind that the system of areas created in 1926-1930 was intended as a transitional stage from the old division to the new and by the early 1930s it had already outlived its purpose. It was, therefore, decided to dispense with the *okrugs* and use the district as the basic link in the socialist chain in the countryside.

With the adoption of the new Soviet Constitution in 1936 the division into regions was extended to the Ukraine and Kazakhstan, so that in 1936 regions numbered 34. As before the territory (*krai*) existed only in the Russian Federation. The Constitution also made some amendments to administrative patterns in the Union Republics: all Autonomous Republics were to become an integral part of Union Republics, since there was no longer any reason for them to remain as part of the territories. Between 1938 and 1939 the regional division was introduced in Byelorussia, Uzbekistan, Kirghizia, Tajikistan and Turkmenia. Naturally, this increased the number of regions which were further affected by the break-up of some territories into smaller units throughout the last war and after.



One important point to make is that the Soviet economy has grown at a swift pace; in the last few years alone industry has grown considerably. The Fourteenth Trade Union Congress in February 1968 made the telling statement that it took almost two decades of peacetime labour to create the prewar industry, yet nowadays the Soviet Union is annually producing considerably more industrial output than it did in all the twenty prewar years. In 1967, for example, the country produced nine and a half times more than it did in 1940. Put more vividly, that means that the country is advancing to communism with a stride nine and a half times longer than before the war. The country has discovered and begun to work new deposits of ferrous and non-ferrous metals, coal, oil and gas; it has commissioned new and mighty power stations and electricity transmission lines. This has engendered large industrial centres. Moreover, the ploughing up of millions of hectares of virgin land and the greatly increased transport and communications have brought a radical shift in population and a change in the whole appearance of previously backward areas. In the light of this the Soviet state has had to make timely adjustments to extant territorial divisions, bringing them into line with contemporary economic tasks and taking into consideration prospects for potential growth. Quite naturally, this brings a simultaneous change in the corresponding territorial limits of exercising authority.

As we have seen, it is the economic demands and the need for the most rational deployment of productive forces that mainly determine adjustments to the administrative-territorial structure, which is closely related to the process of economic zoning.

That, however, is only one aspect, though important, of administration. Another is that the administrative-territorial structure serves consistently to implement socialist democracy, to bring the state apparatus as close as possible to the people, and to create all the requisites for the widest involvement of the people in running the state and for motivating local initiative in carrying out orders from the centre.<sup>5</sup>

As mentioned in Chapter 1, the Soviet government immediately after its inception took steps to organise a ramified network of local Soviets along democratic lines; they were

to possess extensive powers and enough funds to enable them to bring the state apparatus to the grass roots.

This question was in the limelight as the government carried through economic zoning. The Twelfth Party Congress (April 1923) made a special point of stressing that one of the chief tasks in reorganising the administrative-territorial structure was to simplify state agencies, reduce their cost, bring them closer to the people and thereby strengthen the Soviet state apparatus. A Congress decision underlined the need "to make the state apparatus serve the interests of the workers and peasants as fully as possible, to make the state apparatus more accessible and less burdensome to the people and thereby strengthen the worker-peasant alliance".<sup>6</sup>

The Congress suggested substantially increasing the rights of local Soviets, as well as replacing the old administrative structure. Regional bodies were to have greater authority by taking over certain powers, like budget and finance, that had previously come under republican bodies. It was proposed that district and rural bodies would have greater jurisdiction by reorganising the territorial structure, i.e., besides reducing the cost of state apparatus it would strengthen and promote the very authorities that are closest to the people.<sup>7</sup>

The new administrative structure established during the span of seven years, 1923-29, had fewer units, simplified the whole apparatus, cut down on personnel and, as much as the period would allow, brought the state authorities as close as possible to the people. It replaced the old territorial units in order to eliminate the gap between the new administrative system and the economic progress of certain districts; it brought the state apparatus within reach of the people so as to improve public service. By setting up districts, for example, it brought closer to farmers the establishments providing services to them—agronomic and veterinary centres, hospitals, post and telegraph offices, etc.

The administrative pattern was also shaped according to the specific needs of national groups or other sections of the population. The national groups did have, of course, their autonomous formations and when the government was defining the boundaries of autonomous units, it also fixed the borders of neighbouring administrative regions and districts. By doing so, it was able to give comprehensive coverage of national composition and specific welfare needs within the

administrative structure. On Lenin's instructions,<sup>8</sup> the government took account of national composition and economic conditions, and the wishes of the local population, before it fixed the boundaries of autonomous national units.

In conformity with the provisions of their constitutions the Union republican authorities had to reach agreement with neighbouring republics on their borders and had the last word in defining the boundaries of Autonomous Republics and Autonomous regions within their territory. Moreover, the boundaries of Soviet national republics and regions were established not only on the strength of national considerations, but also with due account for economic factors, the proportion of industrial workers in the population of a particular nationality. This provision ensured a material base for each national unit to attain both legal and *de facto* equality in the course of economic and cultural progress.

When the Tatar Autonomous Republic was formed, for example, it included the city of Kazan which had a Russian population of 70.1 per cent.<sup>9</sup> But it had to join the ASSR because it formed an integral economic part of the rest of Tataria. Similarly, when the area of the Bashkir ASSR was extended in 1922, it gained several *uyezds* and *volosts* from the defunct Ufa province, and the capital was transferred to Ufa, even though Bashkirs were in a minority there.

The new socialist administrative-territorial structure enabled many nationalities who had previously been separated by the tsarist bureaucratic system to reunite and capitalise on their new opportunities to expand industry and transport and their own working class and to make huge economic, cultural and political achievements befitting their specific national conditions.

Every time the government has amended the administrative structure it has always taken full account of the multinational nature of the Soviet state. This is an important prerequisite to the equality of all nationalities and enhances their fraternal collaboration and mutual assistance and, ultimately, contributes to the strength of the Soviet Union.

The rich experience of the Soviet state system bears out the vitality and justification of the above-mentioned basic principles of the administrative-territorial structure. The many-sided activity of improving the administrative-

territorial structure in the Union Republics has always been, and is today, based on those very principles. The fifteen Union Republics, as sovereign states, have their own administrative-territorial structure. The RSFSR, for example, has regional and territorial areas, while the Ukraine, Byelorussia, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan have regions only. In some republics, notably Kirghizia and Turkmenia, the regional division only extends over part of their area: regions exist only in the most far-flung and least accessible localities. For that reason state administrative and government bodies in most districts are directly subordinate to republican bodies. Armenia, Latvia, Lithuania, Moldavia and Estonia are divided only into districts, yet the RSFSR, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan contain Autonomous Republics and Autonomous regions.

Each Union Republic's system has formed historically and is traceable to specific conditions which affect its development, e.g., population and territorial size, national composition and economic pattern. Historical administrative divisions, too, have influenced the system of local Soviets in these republics. Despite the differences in the system of local government, they nevertheless operate along uniform lines within the Soviet Union.

Every local Soviet functions, of course, within the bounds of powers defined by law, and the enactments they take are only operative within their own territory. Their powers vary, higher Soviets obviously having greater powers and wider scope than those below them; they also direct and control the lower Soviets which are accountable to them.

The distinctions between different links in the single chain of local authorities comprise differences in scope of power and in some aspects of organisation. They depend on the specific role of each Soviet in the network of state bodies, on the territorial scope of its activity, the size of its material base and its concrete relations with the organisations it directs. A number of organisational factors affect the status or nature of the local Soviet's work, e.g., different electoral rates for electing deputies to town Soviets or different periods for convening various levels of Soviets.

Currently, the following levels of local Soviets prevail: Territorial and Regional Soviets,



Autonomous Regional Soviets,  
National Area Soviets,  
District Soviets,  
Town Soviets and Ward Soviets in towns,  
Township Soviets,  
Rural Soviets.

Each Union Republic has its own system of local Soviets, the biggest of which is that in the RSFSR where all the above-listed Soviets operate. Other republics, like the three Baltic republics—Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia—have only district, town, ward, township and rural Soviets. Each one has its own characteristics.

#### *Territory and Regional Soviets*

There are two categories of territory. One includes autonomous formations, like Autonomous Regions and National areas. The Krasnodar Territory, for example, contains the Adyghei Autonomous Region; the Altai Territory contains the Gorno-Altai Autonomous Region; the Krasnoyarsk Territory contains the Khakassian Autonomous Region, the Taimyr (Dolgano-Nenets) and Evenk National Areas. This category also includes the Khabarovsk Territory containing the Jewish Autonomous Region, and the Stavropol Territory containing the Karachayevo-Cherkess Autonomous Region.

The second category of territories comprises only the Primorye Territory which contains no autonomous units.

Altogether, then, the Soviet Union has six territories, all of which are in the RSFSR, and 114 regions (in January 1971).

The territorial or regional Soviets are a connecting link between the higher state bodies and all the lower Soviets; their functions are to implement Party directives and government orders and to direct the work of all Soviets below them. Although they directly superintend the major and largest sectors of the local economy and social and cultural establishments, their work is predominantly to guide and control. They nonetheless have quite extensive powers in directing local industry, agriculture, trade and municipal services.

How many deputies these Soviets have (and this applies equally to all local Soviets) depends on the provisions of the

Regulations Governing Elections to Local Soviets adopted by the Union republican Supreme Soviet Presidiums.<sup>10</sup>

#### *Autonomous Regional Soviets*

The Autonomous regions occupy a special place in the network of administrative-territorial organisation of state authority, since they are the administrative and political form of autonomy by which the native population is drawn into state administration. Their Soviets are elected by the local population in accordance with the rates laid down in the Union republican legislation. The USSR contains eight Autonomous regions.

The USSR Constitution and the corresponding Union republican constitutions define the Soviets' overall tasks and powers. Suffice it to note that the amount of powers the Autonomous regional Soviets have, and their content and character, are somewhat different from those of the usual administrative regions, in that the Autonomous regions enjoy certain additional rights in national and state affairs.

#### *National Area Soviets*

Just like the Autonomous regions, the National areas are forms of administrative and political national autonomy. All ten National areas existing in the Russian Federation have National area Soviets and lower-standing Soviets as their state authority.

The territory covered by a national area is so vast that it is often larger than several European states, yet population density is very low and the populace is multinational. These factors naturally imprint themselves upon the organisation and activity of the Soviets.

Like the regions, the National areas are divided into districts which, in turn, divide into rural settlements. Among its functions the National area Soviet has to direct all the Soviets below it.

#### *District Soviets*

They are the focal point of socialist construction. District Soviets direct the work of their executive committees and lower-level Soviets—rural, township and town of district subordination. Their functions cover a great deal of economic and cultural matters.

The 1962 Party Programme emphasised the need for further consolidating government bodies at district level. "Special attention should be paid to the strengthening of government bodies at district level. As collective-farm and co-operative and public property draw closer together, a single democratic body administering all enterprises, organisations and institutions at district level will gradually take shape."<sup>11</sup>

The Soviet Union had 3,030 districts in January 1971.

#### *Town Soviets*

In composition town Soviets are made up mainly of industrial workers and intellectuals. But the economic, political and cultural standards of Soviet towns vary greatly, ranging from an industrial metropolis with a few million inhabitants to small towns with only a few thousand residents and a limited number of industrial, municipal and other enterprises.

These differences to a large degree predetermine the great diversity of the town Soviets' activity, the size of their funds, their co-ordination with higher state bodies and the structure of their apparatus. All town Soviets fall into one of three groups:

1. Those subordinate to district Soviets;
2. Those subordinate to territorial, regional and area Soviets or to higher authorities of Autonomous Republics;
3. Those subordinate directly to higher authorities of Union republican state bodies.

There were 1,943 town Soviets in the USSR in January 1971.

#### *Township Soviets*

Township Soviets are formed (Union republican legislation determines whether a populated area qualifies for township status) in populated areas by large factories, mines, power stations, railway stations and other industrial installations located outside a town. Population of the township should normally be no less than three thousand people, of whom at least 85 per cent must be industrial employees and their families. The same factors determine the composition of township Soviets. There were 3,576 in January 1971.

#### *Rural Soviets*

Soviets in the rural localities (stanitsas, villages, auls, hamlets, kishlaks) are the most mass and numerous organs of state power in the localities. They are largely concerned with satisfying the growing cultural and social demands of the rural population, they direct and control the work of schools, clubs, libraries and health institutions. There were 40,866 rural Soviets in January 1971.

Those are, in brief, the component parts of the existing system of local Soviets.

#### LOCAL SOVIETS, ORGANS OF POPULAR RULE

Local Soviets exercise state authority in its entirety over their area; they therefore have extensive power and quite a free hand in resolving local issues and raising matters of national importance. In the words of the Party Central Committee resolution On Improving the Work of Rural and Township Soviets of Working People's Deputies (March 1967), they are "supreme authorities within their area".<sup>12</sup>

The tasks and range of powers of Soviet local government are explicitly stated in the USSR Constitution, Union and Autonomous republican Constitutions, in ordinances adopted by the USSR Supreme Soviet Presidium on basic powers of district, town, rural and township Soviets, republican laws on rural and township Soviets and in the statutes on various levels of local Soviets adopted by Union republican Supreme Soviet Presidiums. On the basis of these enactments local Soviets supervise economic, social and cultural development, compile the local budget, direct the activity of administrative bodies subordinated to them, see that the laws are observed, protect law and order and civil liberties, and help to reinforce the country's defence.

In going about their job, local government bodies tackle questions directly within their competence and also debate problems of republican and Union importance, putting forth their views to the appropriate state bodies. To carry out their functions they possess considerable funds and control numerous industrial, economic, municipal, welfare



and trade enterprises, children's, social, cultural and other establishments. The extent of their powers expresses their plenitude of power in the area under their jurisdiction and depends on the position they hold in the network of representative institutions. Those on the same administrative level, irrespective of any differences in population size, number of townships, etc.,\* possess equal amount of jurisdiction.

The role and importance of local government bodies as the basis of state authority define the range of questions which only the Soviet can resolve. These are the most important pertinent issues for a given area, and by leaving them to local government discretion the Soviet is enabled to exert an influence on all economic, social and cultural sectors, and to exercise effective control over the work of local administrative bodies.<sup>43</sup> Hence, the particular significance of allowing them to approve annual and long-term plans of the various establishments in their jurisdiction, local budgets and reports on their execution. The economic plan, in fact, is the very foundation of life in the Soviet state determining the direction and rate of economic growth, and material and cultural welfare. In other words, the plan constitutes the essence of administration.

Local Soviets also take an active part in drawing up plans that are to be put into effect by establishments at the top of the economic hierarchy in their area. These establishments must align their plans with those of local government on such issues as the production of consumer goods, public utilities, housing, roads, and social and cultural services.

Each local Soviet has its own budget, which is part of the budgets of higher administrative units and enables it to finance economic, social and cultural development, to cover for its administrative expenses and other expenditure envisaged in Union republican legislation. The budgetary powers of local government bodies include the examination

\* The following example illustrates the types of differences in local Soviet activities. In Krasnodar Territory, of the 358 rural Soviets there, 67 cover a population of up to 3,000, 185 of between 3,000 and 7,500, 88 of between 7,500 and 18,000, and 18 of more than 18,000; 112 rural Soviets embrace 1-3 villages, 81-3-5, 117-5-10, and 48-over 10 villages.

and ratification at their sessions of budgets, supervision of their implementation and control of the proper utilisation of their funds. The sessions also examine and ratify reports on budget execution.

Further, they exercise certain powers associated with their internal procedure and activity: they elect a chairman and a secretary of a session, they adopt its agenda, appoint a credentials committee, verify the credentials of deputies, annul the election of various deputies when necessary, set up standing committees, deputies' councils and groups, supervise their work, and release deputies from their duties at their own request (in the event of protracted illness or their moving to another region).

All state bodies and officials are accountable to the Soviets and under their control, so that the Soviets can supervise the day-to-day work of all state bodies, conduct truly immense work in establishing the material and technical basis of communism and raise cultural and living standards.

Since legislative and executive authority is indivisible in the USSR, the executive and administrative agencies of local government (by Art. 99 of the USSR Constitution) are the executive committees of local Soviets. Local government bodies themselves enjoy the exclusive right to elect the executive committees and change their composition whenever necessary. They also form departments and boards of their executive committees, confirm and, if necessary, remove their heads.\* Moreover, regional, territory, town, Autonomous regional and National area Soviets elect their corresponding courts.\*\*

Local Soviets have constant control over their executive committees, departments and boards. This control takes a number of forms, the most important of which is the hearing of reports on how the executive committees are carrying out

\* See the last section of the present chapter for details of the organisation and activities of executive committees, their departments and boards.

\*\* District (city) people's courts are elected otherwise; judges are elected by citizens of that particular district (city) on the basis of universal, equal and direct suffrage by secret voting; people's assessors are elected at public meetings at place of work or residence. This is in accordance with Art. 19 of the Fundamentals of Legislation on the Judicial System of the USSR, the Union and Autonomous Republics.

their work. They hear these reports no less than once a year, in conformity with the Laws and Statutes on local Soviets and by tradition. This form of control provides deputies with an opportunity to keep abreast of the work of bodies subordinate to the Soviet, to expose their mistakes and take steps to put things right. Further, executive committees must account to the Soviets on what they have done in response to deputies' criticisms. Such regular reports help raise the level of Soviet control over their executive and administrative agencies, help to better the work of the state apparatus as a whole, and to promote the activity of deputies and their voluntary helpers.

Local Soviets also enjoy the right to take decisions, whose non-fulfilment entails payment of fines to be exacted by administrative order. They can do so on such questions as public order, town planning and provision of housing, forestry protection, conservation of gardens and parks, wells and water resources, hunting and fishing rights, traffic safety regulations, etc., whenever the occasion arises locally.

The Ordinance of the RSFSR Supreme Soviet Presidium of March 3, 1962 On the Further Limitation of the Application of Fines Imposed by Administrative Order<sup>14</sup> and similar enactments by other Union Republics list the issues on which local Soviets are empowered to make decisions providing for administrative sanctions. Territorial, regional, area, district and town Soviets are empowered to adopt acts that establish administrative responsibility. Their executive committees enjoy that right only in the event of natural disasters, epidemics or outbreak of virulent animal diseases. The rural and township Soviets do not enjoy such powers. The maximum fine that a local Soviet can establish may not exceed 10 rubles for ordinary citizens and 50 rubles for officials. Decisions providing for administratively imposed fines are only valid for two years.

These questions constitute the terms of reference of the Soviet, to be reviewed only at its regular sessions. However, its terms of reference are, in fact, broader. Being the higher organs of power of a respective territory, the Soviets direct practically all aspects of local life. The Soviets have contributed greatly to the cause of communist construction in every field of political, administrative, economic, social and cultural activity. But, due to the sessional method of their

functioning, they are unable to directly settle all the questions pertinent to these spheres of activity. This necessitates the existence of organising centres which provide for the regular activity of the Soviets, for their systematic guidance of all aspects of life of a territory. These centres are the executive and administrative bodies with a general competence—the Executive Committees. The Executive Committee is the organ of the respective Soviet itself. Judging by the composition of the Executive Committee, the method of its formation, its responsibilities and accountability and the nature of its functioning, we may define its activity as one of the organisational and legal forms of Soviet government. For this reason, many of the questions which come under the jurisdiction of the local Soviets are referred to the joint terms of reference of the Soviets and their Executive Committees, and not exclusively to the Soviets. These questions may be considered both by the Soviet and its Executive Committee. But here, too, the Soviet plays the main role, for it determines whether a given question should be reviewed by the Soviet itself or by its Executive Committee.

Local government bodies maintain their dominating position in the system of state authorities because they discuss only those questions that have most relevance for their own particular area. Nonetheless their range of activity is tremendous.

Thus, the Zaporozhye Regional Soviet (the Ukrainian Republic) looked into the question of how the electors' instructions and proposals were being implemented in the Region; the October District Soviet (the city of Kirov) reviewed the state of housing construction and the building of cultural and community centres; the Vilnius City Soviet (the Lithuanian Republic) considered the observance of socialist legality and the maintenance of public order; the Tiraspol City Soviet (the Moldavian Republic) discussed the question of forest conservation along the Dniester.

The Soviets direct industrial enterprises subordinate to them, ratify their rules, determine the size of management staffs, control the implementation of production plans and the use of funds, and appoint and dismiss managers and chief specialists. Furthermore, they see that each enterprise makes the fullest and most efficient use of production



capacities, natural resources and internal reserves, arrange for the recording and accounting at all enterprises and control these operations, supervise economic work of local firms, see that economic levers are manipulated correctly, and the cost accounting principle is strictly adhered to. Their aim is to expand production in all directions, improve quality and reduce production costs of consumer goods so as to meet local requirements. In addition they arrange for material and technical supplies and marketing of products from their subordinate enterprises, promote and strengthen direct contacts between the enterprises and trading organisations.

They also do much work in directing agriculture and are fully responsible for the state of agriculture in their respective areas. With their knowledge of local conditions and potentialities, they help collective and state farms to disseminate up-to-date experience. They inform farms on state purchasing plans for produce and ensure that each farm supplies the state with corresponding stocks, taking into account its prospects for economic advance, its specialisation and the need to retain enough produce to extend production and meet farmers' personal requirements. Through their departments and boards, standing committees, deputies and broad public support, every level of local government influences farming and helps farmers to improve the yield of their fields and animals.

The local Soviets also do a great deal to expand direct links between the collective and state farms, on the one hand, and local industry processing agricultural raw materials and trading organisations, on the other, so that the urban population obtain top quality products.

Through their executive and administrative bodies, they see that land is properly used, that land tenure legislation is enforced, and that farmers take good care of their machinery and implements. They also see that all farms observe the principles of internal democracy, adhere to the letter of the Collective Farm Rules, and encourage their members to participate in discussing and resolving vital questions.

The amount and nature of local government activity in agriculture directly depend on the standing of each Soviet among representative institutions. The widest range of

powers in agriculture falls to regional (or territorial) Soviets and their executive and administrative agencies (executive committees). District Soviets and their executive committees ensure the fulfilment of Party and government decisions on improving agriculture and especially the output of meat, milk, grain and other produce, the strict observance of state, production and labour discipline; they vigorously support and implement scientific attainments and leading experience, improve agricultural planning on the basis of firm and stable state assignments, improve techniques and attain more effective use of the land, machinery, labour and material resources, and enhance the profitability of all crops. District Soviets and their executive committees are particularly active in organising the implementation of decisions taken by higher state bodies on farming questions and in seeing that collective democracy is always observed.

Rural Soviets and their executive committees examine annual and long-term plans of collective and state farms, introduce their proposals in house building plans, in the provision of social and welfare services, the planning of villages and townships, and the use of manpower. They also have the right to make proposals to the executive committee immediately superior to them on collective-farm rules in their area. Rural and township Soviets help collective and state farms to boost their production and fulfil production and financial plans.<sup>15</sup>

Local government bodies do much to organise public services. In recent years local Soviets have come to play a bigger part in providing local amenities. That is as it should be. By virtue of their status in the state system they are best able to serve the prime needs of the local population. It is the Party aim to make the provision of amenities a very important aspect of social production and to muster all technical and scientific experience to provide the best facilities. Vast sums are earmarked for this purpose and it is the duty of local government to see that the funds are properly deployed and that state targets are met.

Housing is one aspect of this work. Here the local Soviets operate through the organisations under their jurisdiction and plan, finance and control the supply of the materials

and technical know-how. With the assistance of the public, they allocate accommodation to the needy.

Local government bodies are also in charge of water supply, electricity, gas, sewage and the district heating system; they see that these services are in good working condition and arrange for the provision of new facilities. Among other public services they are responsible for the laundries, hairdressers', dressmakers', photographers', and repair shops for clothing and footwear. They supervise local transport, the petrol, tram and trolley bus services, look after the roads, bridges, dams, fords and road signs, and lay out parks, gardens and green belts.

Local Soviets supervise the health service so that the local population may enjoy free medical care in hospitals, surgeries and at home; they see that hospitals, surgeries, first aid posts and other medical and therapeutic services operate normally, and they build new ones. They also supervise the sanitary arrangements of all residential areas, factories and cultural and welfare institutions.

They direct the activity of schools and other institutions of learning, build new ones, control their work, see that the universal education law is observed, and take steps to strengthen the ties between school and real life and to provide all students with technical and practical knowledge that will enable them to choose a suitable trade on leaving school. They are also responsible for all cultural amenities in their area, providing funds for cultural and educational work, seeing that clubs, libraries, theatres, cinemas and houses of culture keep up to the mark, and taking steps to increase cultural facilities. They supervise the work done by cultural and educational institutions, reinforce their activities in educating the new citizen of communist society.

Another of their jobs is to ensure that citizens receive full pensions and benefits they are entitled to by law, and to expand the social security service (for example, by building more old people's and invalids' homes) and supervise its operation.

They organise state and co-operative trade and public catering, increase the number of shops, kiosks, restaurants, cafes and other trade and public catering establishments, and check on their proper location and observance of the trading regulations.

One of their principal concerns is to ensure that all citizens, officials, organisations, factories and offices obey the law. By the Soviet Constitution and the laws and statutes on local Soviets, they are required to organise the implementation of laws, see that they are strictly observed, protect the lawful rights and interests of the public and safeguard law and order. To these ends they keep a daily check on the legality of decisions and other enactments made by organisations under their aegis. Their executive committees carefully check every infringement of Soviet law and other enforceable enactments of state bodies committed by officials of these organisations. They take strict measures against all offenders. Further, they direct the bodies dealing with internal affairs and hear reports from the local agencies of the interior at local Soviet sessions and at executive committee meetings. After studying the evidence, they indicate deficiencies in their work, outline ways of removing them, and strengthen public order. They assist the courts, Procurator's Office and other organisations in their campaign against crime, partly by explaining Soviet laws, extending juridical help to the public and drawing the people at large into keeping the peace.

Parallel with this work, local government bodies help to strengthen the country's defences by seeing that no one evades the national service, that all institutions obey the conscription law, by giving all possible assistance to the Defence Ministry in the conscription for military service and for training. It is, in fact, the responsibility of the executive committees to see that all young people of call-up age are registered.

When carrying out their obligations, the local Soviets deal both with organisations subordinate to them (either directly or through their management bodies) and with those that are not subordinate. Their relations with the latter depend on what facets of activity of those organisations they are concerned with. They do have the right to issue orders for them and, if these are not carried out, the appropriate officials can be called to task and even dealt with administratively. For example, all local Soviets (except rural, township and ward Soviets in cities) have the right to issue decisions that bear administrative sanctions if they are flouted (for instance, for dealing with natural disasters



and epidemics). Moreover, higher bodies not infrequently empower local Soviets to issue specific decisions which apply equally to non-subordinate bodies for such events as preparing transport, including rail transport, for the spring and summer periods, or for the regular servicing of road transport at a time when farm produce deliveries are being made to the state.

They are empowered to issue other decisions affecting the whole population and that are valid throughout their own area irrespective of what other organisations operate there. They might take such decisions, for example, when they are arranging and carrying out elections to state bodies and people's courts (the formation of electoral constituencies and precincts, allocating ward premises and confirming electoral commissions).

Local Soviets also have control over certain aspects of the work of non-subordinate enterprises and organisations. These aspects include the following:

(i) economic, social and cultural services provided for the employees of these organisations (departmental housing, town planning, provision of greenery and the sanitary conditions of factory, office, service and living accommodation, and observation of fire safety precautions);

(ii) meeting public requirements and providing social services for the area covered by the Soviet (transport, communications, cultural, educational and entertainment establishments).

The local government bodies see that the law is observed in the activities of all non-subordinate establishments. Whenever the need arises, they take steps to remove shortcomings both directly and through the medium of higher agencies if they spot any infringements of enforceable enactments, any disregard or violation of the legitimate rights and interests of employees, any negligence, bureaucracy or other apparent mismanagement. They do not, however, have the authority to interfere in the day-to-day administration of these enterprises. That is a matter for higher state management bodies.

These are just some of the issues that come within the competence of local Soviets. In fact, there are scarcely any local affairs with which they do not deal in one way or another.

## SESSIONAL PROCEDURE IN LOCAL GOVERNMENT BODIES

Sessions are the principal organisational and legal form of Soviet activity. They give self-government bodies every opportunity to cope with local economic, social and cultural matters, to direct and supervise the work of their own executive and administrative bodies. Moreover, because the sessions are short and convened periodically, deputies can continue their normal employment, keep contact with their fellow workers, make known their wishes, needs and requests, take an active and direct part in implementing the Soviet's decisions, and keep track of their fulfilment. The sessions, being general meetings of all Soviet deputies, ensure a truly collective discussion and settlement of issues. Suffice it to quote the following figure: in 1969 as many as 1,159,497 deputies spoke at district Soviet sessions. That means that the majority of Soviet deputies took an active part in examining the issues under review, and voiced the will of their constituents as well as their own attitude towards the particular aspects of the Soviets' work. That also helps the Soviets to take decisions that most correctly correspond to voters' wishes. They play an important part in mobilising the public to carry out the tasks of building communism. As a result of all this public attention is riveted to debates on all issues in the Soviet.

How frequently the Soviet meets depends, by constitutional requirement, on the amount of business each level of Soviets has to deal with and on the need for each Soviet to retain some regularity in its meetings. Because the range of questions dealt with by higher Soviets is wider and more intricate than that dealt with by lower bodies, their deputies need a longer period of preparation and implementation of decisions. That explains why the higher echelons of Soviets (territorial, regional, city with ward divisions) meet more seldom than other local Soviets. Pursuant to the Union and Autonomous republican constitutions, the higher Soviets, mentioned above, meet no less than four times a year (in Kazakhstan regional Soviets meet three times). All other local Soviets meet no less than six times a year (in Kazakhstan district Soviets meet four times).

The laws and statutes on local Soviets, which are in line with the constitutional requirement of total number of sessions, make important additions to the constitutional norms. The constitutions require local Soviets to meet no less than once every three months (in the case of Soviets meeting four times a year) or every other month (in the case of Soviets meeting six times a year). The statutes provide for evenness in the Soviet's work throughout its duration and preclude the possibility of large gaps between sessions.

It is the responsibility of executive committees to convene local Soviet sessions, although the Soviets may also convene extraordinary meetings on their own initiative, or these may be summoned by no less than one-third of the Soviet's deputies, or by higher Soviets and their executive committees.

For the Soviet to do its work properly it is essential for it to make three provisions: that it considers and resolves the most pressing economic and cultural issues, that it prepares sessions carefully and comprehensively, and that it organises each meeting properly and efficiently. Each session may examine any question within the Soviet's competence, primarily issues of major economic, cultural and social importance, for example, the economic plans, budget, work of industry, agricultural development, the housing situation, social and municipal amenities, the work of authorities concerned with education, health, trade, public catering, protection of state and personal property, and combatting crime. The meetings regularly discuss reports of executive committees and of the heads of different bodies of the government and economic apparatus, and reports on the implementation of voters' instructions.

The local Soviets, too, give special attention to the effects of the economic reform. The Volgograd Regional Soviet, for example, gave very careful consideration to the reform: before deputies even debated the issue at one of its sessions they visited factories, endeavoured to iron out various difficulties, and analysed the causes of shortcomings. They were especially interested in economic services. During their preparations for the session they involved standing committees not only of the regional Soviet, but of the town and ward Soviets, and several departments and boards of their executive committees.

When the Soviet met, the debate was a very informed one, with deputies pointing out the real advantages of the new economic methods. Factories that had switched to the new system had boosted output and substantially improved quality. Furthermore, real wages had risen as a result of additional bonus payments. But the advantages did not end there. With higher profits, factories were able to set aside more money for housing, cultural, social and municipal amenities. The Soviet set out in its adopted decision specific measures aimed at developing the new planning and economic incentive system.

There are 5 collective farms and 15 state farms in Izo-bilnoye District, Stavropol Territory. Every year they produce and sell to the state tens of thousands of tons of grain, meat, milk, wool, vegetables and fruit. The local Soviet, naturally, cannot be indifferent to the trend, rate and methods of development of these farms. While rendering them assistance in tapping internal reserves, the Soviets discharge their control functions. They keep their eyes on the observance of the land law, collective-farm rules, and watch over the implementation of their production and financial plans, combatting economic mismanagement and wastefulness, breaches of state and labour discipline.

The District Executive Committee took up the question of the organisation of farm production in view of the serious shortcomings revealed by farmers in their letters to the Soviet, their applications and complaints. Before the Executive Committee decided to place the question on the agenda of its next session, it organised a comprehensive check on the implementation of Soviet laws by state and collective farms. It drew to this work local deputies, farming specialists, workers from the EC finance department, from trade union organisations, the courts and the Procurator's Office. They studied the results of the implementation of production and financial plans and government assignments, they checked on the observance of the land law and collective-farm rules, they looked into the state of labour discipline, the acceptance and dismissal of workers on state farms, labour organisation and remuneration on collective farms, and examined workers' complaints and applications. The verification showed that the farms strictly adhered to Soviet laws and fulfilled their obligations to the state on schedule.



Although the Executive Committee had amassed a great number of materials, it did not stop at this. Through the district newspaper and local radio it informed the voters about the Soviet's coming agenda and asked them to forward their proposals and wishes to the Soviet. The voters responded to the call. The Executive Committee received many letters on the ways of reducing mismanagement, heightening the responsibility of officials, strengthening discipline and improving available legal service in the countryside. Understandably, valuable suggestions were adopted at the session and included in the Soviet's decision.

The chairmen of the Executive Committees and the standing committees of the rural Soviets, heads of collective and state farms, team leaders, farm managers, workers from the EC departments, and the organisations serving the rural population attended the session. The deputies discussed shortcomings and omissions in the work of various agencies and proposed measures aimed at improving matters in the nearest future. The district Soviet appraised the situation and obliged the Executive Committees of the local Soviets to increase their control over the observance and execution of Soviet laws, to combat most vigorously mismanagement and extravagance, parochialism and dependence on others.

A year passed, during which time the situation in the district changed beyond recognition. The Soviets now show a greater interest in farm production and have become more qualified in solving agricultural problems. They have increased their aid to the collective and state farms and make more exacting demands on the administration. At present, the district Soviets pay closer attention to the economic activities of the collective and state farms, review more regularly reports by their heads on the fulfilment of plans and assignments and the observance of the land law and the collective-farm rules.

Discussions in Soviet sessions are not confined to industrial and agricultural matters. They spend just as much time on improving cultural services. The Moscow Soviet, for example, regularly debates ways of improving cultural services to the public. A rapporteur from the Moscow City Soviet stated at a session that the capital's cultural institutions had much improved. They had staged a number of highly artistic performances and concerts and in-

creased the number of libraries and bookshops. Muscovites had a wide choice of events of interest in parks, palaces of culture and clubs, and could participate in mass excursions, carnivals, literary discussions, meetings with artists, actors, scientists, and so on. The rapporteur went on to say that, all the same, the development of cultural institutions and their facilities still lagged behind the city's growth rate and the ever increasing needs of the public.

In subsequent speeches, deputies delved deeply into the matter and made proposals that would considerably improve the work of Moscow's cultural establishments. At the end of the debate the Soviet took a comprehensive decision outlining measures to improve the city's cultural and recreation facilities.

The Soviets are greatly concerned with the improvement of organisational mass work, this question being discussed at their sessions. By way of illustration, the Taldom District Soviet (Moscow Region) discussed the tasks of the Executive Committees of the local Soviets and the role of deputies in production and public activities. As the chairman of the District Executive Committee said in his report to the session, "this question came up for discussion in connection with the need to solve the new complex tasks which now face us". He presented a detailed analysis of the achievements and shortcomings of the district's economy, its social and cultural development and the services rendered to the population. The chief purpose of this discussion was to highlight the role played by deputies of all district Soviets in the economic progress of the area. The speakers referred to many examples of greater interconnection between the work and public activities of deputies. As a rule, an efficient deputy is at once a front-ranking worker. Those deputies who showed poor results in their own jobs were subjected to sharp criticism. In conclusion, the chairman spoke of the ways and means of improving all the organisational forms of Soviet activity, of carrying out the voters' instructions, and of the work of seminars for deputies.

In addition to the district Soviet deputies, the discussion was attended by 178 persons who were invited to the meeting. These were deputies of the Taldom Town Soviet and of the rural and township Soviets of the district who participated in the lively debate: the chairmen of the

Executive Committees of the rural and township Soviets, the chairmen of their standing committees and deputies. The decision adopted by the session highlighted the achievements and shortcomings and outlined measures to improve the activity of the local Soviets; it determined the means by which to extend the influence of deputies in all sectors of the district's economic, social and cultural life.

A Soviet's executive committee, its standing committees or its deputies may bring matters to the notice of each session, but the final word on whether an item is included on the agenda remains with the Soviet itself. At the start of every session, it examines the agenda put forward by its executive committee, then either ratifies or rejects it by a majority vote of deputies. Items may be included in the agenda in the course of the session, too.

In preparation for the session a prior careful investigation is made of the work of the Soviet's executive and administrative bodies, of organisations and establishments subordinate to it, and of cultural and welfare services for residents of the area covered by the Soviet. This circum-spect preparation gives deputies a chance to give careful consideration to an item on the agenda and to discover the best way to improve the situation. A great deal of organisation goes into preparation, involving the collection and studying of documents concerned with the agenda, the compiling of reports and draft decisions and the taking of organisational measures that involve the public at large and specific agencies in the work. Although the executive committees are in charge of all preparations, they are not the only participants in the preparatory work; it also involves standing committees, deputies and the Soviet's active voluntary workers. Sometimes the standing committees and deputies are not merely the initiators of business, but also the chief pursuers of the preparatory work. The wider contact is made with the public and the more deputies and activists can be drawn into the preparations, the greater are the forces of the executive committee personnel, inasmuch as popular experience supplements the experience of its staff and the agenda item receives a wide public airing, thus enhancing the likelihood that the correct decision will be taken.

When the Vologda Regional Soviet met, for example, it discussed measures for promoting municipal services. This

elicited a great amount of public interest, both because the issue was topical, and because many deputies and members of standing committees had taken part in drawing it up. The executive committee received dozens of suggestions affecting management aspects of housing, transport, roads, the work of welfare service enterprises, and urban and rural recreation. A substantial part of deputies' and constituents' suggestions was examined at the meeting, and others were forwarded to various departments for implementing by a certain time. The decision of the Soviet became a specific programme of action for all deputies.

It is also very important to give deputies and the public clear and prompt notification of the agenda, and the time and place of Soviet sessions. This enables constituents to play an active part in sessional work, meet their deputies before the session starts and make known to them their specific proposals on issues on the agenda. Long before a session of the Ferghana City Soviet, for example, the Soviet's executive committee sent out a questionnaire to discover the public's views on the general change-over to the five-day working week. A whole host of observations and suggestions poured into the executive committee offices and, in a sense, nearly two thousand citizens made themselves heard at the Soviet meeting.

A session of a local Soviet is valid if not less than two-thirds of its members are present. Deputies from higher Soviets may also be present, but with voice only (no vote), so that they may keep abreast of developments within their constituency and co-ordinate their work with that of lower Soviets and their deputies. The first session always begins with the adoption of standing orders. A report is then usually made by one of the executive committee heads. At the end of debates and summing-up speeches the Soviet takes stock of its completed work, outlines its measures, and indicates the principal tasks of its executive and administrative bodies. This it does by adopting particular enactments which, as required by Article 98 of the USSR Constitution, are in the form of decisions and orders. In practice, however, only decisions are used.

Activists as well as deputies have the right to make amendments and corrections to draft decisions. Voting is open and confined to deputies of that particular Soviet; a



simple majority of deputies present is sufficient to have the decision passed. All decisions are taken in full conformity with the laws and other legal enactments of higher organs of state power and administration. Within the bounds of the Soviet's competence, they are binding on all bodies, organisations and citizens within the area covered by the Soviet. Their publication rests with the executive committee which, in accordance with, for example, Art. 30 of the Model Statute on Rural and Township Soviets of Working People's Deputies is obliged to bring decisions to the notice of all interested parties within five days.<sup>16</sup> All major decisions are made known to the public residing within the Soviet's area. The ways of doing this are multifarious and depend on the level of the Soviet and the facilities at its command. It may make known the decisions by radio broadcast, by publishing decisions in territorial, regional and district newspapers, by posting a printed text of the decision in prominent places in every populated area, or by deputies going out and informing the public.

Higher Soviets possess the authority to revoke local government decisions; their executive committees may simply suspend their operation. Enactments of Autonomous regional Soviets, however, are only revokable by corresponding Union republican bodies.

A most important principle of the work of local Soviets is the publicity it gets. Their entire activity—from sessions and standing committee meetings to the work of deputies in their own constituencies—and that of general and sectional management agencies (executive committee meetings, the work of sections and boards, etc.) is conducted openly, in full view of the public and with their direct and active participation.

In regard to Soviet sessions publicity signifies above all informing the public in the Soviet's area of the times when the Soviet will meet and the items it intends to discuss. Any dweller in town and township is familiar with notices on the street or in his local press with the following news-item:

#### "COMRADE ELECTORS

"The Soviet is to meet on such-and-such a date. It is to debate the following items" (then follows a list of items). "You are requested to forward your comments and sug-

gestions on these items to the Soviet executive committee" (name of the Soviet and address of its executive committee).

Notices such as the following are posted, for instance, in industrial enterprises and institutions of Omsk: "Preparations are in progress for the convocation of the next session of our District Soviet. Problems to be discussed: local trade, public catering and services. Let's have your opinion, comrade."

The preliminary acquaintance of the public with draft decisions of a forthcoming session of the Soviet is another, more effective, means of public information. It enables voters to forward their proposals and amendments not only on the agenda of a regular session, but concerning the Soviet's decision as well. A special column entitled "The Voice of the Elector Before a Session" is often used by the local press after the Soviet's draft resolution has been made public. It includes local voters' proposals and opinions regarding the questions to be discussed. The deputies themselves disseminate extensive information on the forthcoming session. They meet with their voters, pay visits to the various enterprises and institutions in their areas. Special questionnaires are circulated in these establishments, and voters' proposals and remarks are collected and analysed.

All these means of close communication between the local bodies and the masses increase the efficiency of the Soviets and enable the electors to keep abreast of their affairs.

The wide dissemination of information is an important, though not the only means of publicity. No less important is to draw the public directly into sessional preparations: gathering documents for a report and draft decision, checking on the work of the executive and administrative apparatus, and compiling the report and draft decision. Not infrequently, more activists have a hand in the preparations than deputies. More than 600 people, for example, took part in sessional preparations for the Leningrad City Soviet which was to debate public catering in the city. For these purposes, the Soviet's Standing Committee on Trade set up 25 teams of deputies and activists who investigated the work of more than 500 public catering establishments all over the city.

Meetings of the Soviets are open in the sense that any person can be present, and some are specially invited to be present and given the right to speak but not vote. This procedure for arranging and conducting sessions by which every person has a real opportunity to participate in the Soviet's business enables the Soviet to take decisions which most fully accord with the needs and interests of the public. Sessional procedure, however, is not something fixed and immutable; over the years it has taken various forms and, of late, a new form of "mobile sessions" and "sessions with no reports" has become popular.

The Soviets conduct their "mobile sessions" in factories, on building sites, state and collective farms, and at various localities throughout their area. They invite to their meetings activists, deputies of lower Soviets and members of the public whose place of residence or occupation lies within the Soviet's area. Being well informed on local affairs they are in a position to offer assistance to deputies and help them to arrive at useful and most expedient decisions.

Soviet sessions at which no official report is made are another new form of local Soviet work. This form does not mean, however, that there is no report at all on the questions to be debated. Such a report exists, but it is not heard by deputies at a session, for they have studied it beforehand. The report, circulated among them well in advance, enables the Soviet to proceed at once with the co-report of a standing committee or discussions by its deputies. This tends to make meetings more efficient and business-like, and encourages criticism and self-criticism.

#### LOCAL GOVERNMENT STANDING COMMITTEES

Once the session is over, this does not spell the end of local government activity; it continues in other organisational forms, one of which is the standing committees. They most demonstrably manifest the nature of the Soviets as working agencies which implement as well as pass laws. They are formed at the first session of each new convocation for a period of two years, i.e., for the duration of the Soviet itself. Their number varies, depending on the level of the

Soviet: the higher the Soviet the more committees it has. Rural and township Soviets have 3-4 committees, district 7-9, town 7-12, and regional and territorial up to 15. The number of standing committees and deputies serving on them is constantly in flux, as the table below shows.

Convocation	Number of standing committees	Number of deputies serving on them
Eighth (1961)	243,958	1,394,920
Ninth (1963)	243,700	1,520,941
Tenth (1965)	297,895	1,638,958
Eleventh (1967)	301,760	1,666,513
Twelfth (1969)	315,182	1,670,220

In addition, some 2,624,000 non-deputy activists help in the work of the committees.

Local government bodies have substantial independence in determining the list of committees they set up.\* In fact, the Statutes on Local Soviet Standing Committees leave this matter either completely to the discretion of the Soviet or provide only a rough guide to committees that have to be created. Thus, the Statute on Standing Committees of regional, town, district, township and rural Soviets of Working People's Deputies of the Uzbek SSR requires (Point 3, Section 1) that local Soviets may set up the following standing committees: Budget and Finance, Agriculture, Irrigation and Land Reclamation, Culture and Education, Schools, Health, Defence and Physical Recreation, Road Construction, Municipal Services and Town and Country Planning, Local Industry, Trade, and others, depending on local needs and specific conditions.

The list of standing committees which local Soviets can form is not identical in the various republics and depends on their different conditions. Rural and township Soviets, however, are guided by the Model Statute on Rural and

\* The procedure for setting up local Soviet standing committees, organising their work, their rights and duties are all laid down in special Statutes issued by Supreme Soviet Presidium of Union Republics. See *Polozheniya o postoyannykh komissiyakh mestnykh Sovietov deputatov trudyashchikhsya (Statutes on Standing Committees of Local Soviets of Working People's Deputies)*, Moscow, 1958.



Township Soviets of Working People's Deputies (Art. 46) and the relevant republican laws which establish what committees they must set up: Credentials Committee, Plan and Budget Committee, and Committee on Socialist Legality and Public Order. Similar rules are contained in the Model Statutes of district and town Soviets. These statutes also indicate the need to set up youth committees. Nonetheless, even at these levels they do have considerable freedom in determining the list of committees. That is implied in the statutory provision that rural, township, district and town Soviets, by dint of their local conditions, enjoy the right to form other committees to cover various economic and cultural sectors. When it comes to setting up the committees, the local Soviets do greatly transcend the limits of the statutory list; their main criterion in deciding how many committees they will have is their peculiar economic and area conditions.

The most widespread standing committees are the Credentials, Budget and Finance, Agriculture, Industry, Construction, Transport and Communications, Education and Culture, Health and Social Security, Socialist Legality and Public Order, Road Construction and Town and Country Planning, Trade and Public Catering, and Youth Affairs. Others are formed for Local Amenities, Nature Conservation, and Physical Culture and Sport.

Exactly who serves on the committees is a matter for the Soviet to decide on the basis of deputies' preferences, qualifications, knowledge and experience of the work in hand. The Standing Committee on Socialist Legality and Public Order of Moscow's Leningradsky Ward Soviet, for example, comprises the following members (listed by occupation): two law college lecturers, the head of a legal advice bureau, a serviceman, a leading worker from the USSR Ministry of Civil Aviation, the chief of the internal affairs department of the district Executive Committee, a worker from a machine-building plant, a team leader from a designing institute, the chief of a factory shop, the technical inspector of a research institute, the chairman of the district people's court, the chief of the enquiry section of the internal affairs department of the district Executive Committee, and the district procurator. Such a membership enables the committee to make an informed study of conditions prevailing

in organisations throughout the Soviet's area and at the same time to take into account the opinion of those who are directly engaged in production.

Other committees are formed in the same way, both for the Leningradsky district and other Soviets; they consist primarily of deputies engaged in the particular sphere covered by the committee's work. The Standing Committee on Municipal Amenities of the same Soviet, for example, comprises the following deputies: manager of a factory producing sewn goods, a tool-setter from the same factory, a team leader of the factory, a receptionist at a dry cleaning works, a hairdresser, a sorter at a shoe repair factory, a milliner, the manager of a clothes' sewing workshop, a radio engineer from a TV repair works, a mechanic, the chairman of a factory trade union committee at an engineering works, chief technologist at an engineering works, and a fitter at a machine works. As this example illustrates, the proportion of specialists in the given field is even greater than the first example. Of the 14 committee members, 12 actually work for concerns providing municipal amenities.

Only deputies of a particular Soviet may be chosen to serve on standing committees in most Union Republics. The only exceptions are in the Baltic republics—Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia—where the Statutes allow non-deputy activists to serve on committees. In Latvia and Lithuania, this provision is confined to rural and township Soviets.

Standing committees are completely responsible and accountable to the Soviets that set them up. Only the Soviet has the power to dissolve existing and form new standing committees, make changes to their composition, hear reports on their work, and pass decisions that are binding on the committees. The committees are not subordinate to higher Soviets, their standing committees and executive committees. They base their relations with their Soviet's executive committee on co-ordinated action, co-operation and mutual assistance. They help it to carry out its functions and prepare questions for its meetings. Further, they take part in executive committee meetings with voice but no vote, familiarise themselves with its work programme and all the necessary documents. At the same time they are constantly receiving effective assistance in return: the executive committee encourages valuable initiative, summarises their

experience, summons joint meetings to exchange ideas, and aids the committees in preparing and conducting meetings.

For their part, the standing committees participate actively in preparing questions for discussion at local Soviet sessions, have a hand in collecting materials for the main report, make co-reports at the session, take part in formulating the draft decision, check on the activity of departments and boards of the executive committee, establishments and organisations subordinate to the given Soviet. Furthermore, they supervise the implementation of government ordinances, the decisions of higher state authorities, local Soviets and their executive committees, and help to put them into effect and to eradicate any infringements of socialist legality and civil liberties, or any manifestations of bureaucracy and red tape.

They are able to carry out the duties vested in them only by acquiring the rights to do so. They enjoy the right to examine (within the bounds of their activity) any economic, cultural and social issue that is within the competence of their local Soviet; to check the work of all establishments within the area of their Soviet while not interfering in their operations; to demand, in pursuance of their checking, materials and explanations from heads of organisations; to adopt decisions on items under review; to make reports and co-reports at Soviet sessions, and to propose the inclusion of their suggestions in sessional business.

That they make use of their rights is apparent from the activity, for example, of standing committees in the Ukraine during one year only when they made as many as 48,900 main reports at local Soviet sessions and 52,200 at executive committee meetings. Given the existence in the Ukraine of 10,243 local Soviets, it is clear that practically no session took place without a report or a co-report from a standing committee member. Their themes at such meetings are normally concerned with improving work in one or another branch of management, or bettering the work of the state apparatus. They also speak about the work of industry, expanding agricultural output, developing Soviet trade, improving medical, cultural and municipal services, observing socialist legality, and dealing with complaints and applications from the public.

In 1968, for example, the standing committees prepared

for local Soviet examination as many as 62,637 questions concerned with the plan and budget, 86,335 on agriculture, 32,221 on education, 19,173 on health and social security, 21,262 on trade and public catering, 1,400 on nature conservancy, and 28,104 on socialist legality and law and order. In the following year the committees prepared 363,400 items for the Soviets to review and 651,000 for executive committee conferences.

How successful the standing committees are hinges on efficient organisation, able and qualified leadership, which resides with the chairman, his vice-chairmen and the secretary chosen by the other committee members. The chairman arranges and directs the work of the committee, regularly calls meetings, sees that they keep to the work schedule and adopted decisions, and maintains constant contact with the Soviet and its executive committee.

The work of the standing committee takes several forms: by means of meetings, by investigating the work of the executive committee departments and various organisations, and by attaching committee members and activists to enterprises. Of all the forms, the meetings are most important. It is there that the committees act as collegial agencies, collectively discussing questions and outlining concrete suggestions. They meet normally no less than once a month, or every other month in some republics. At a higher level (territorial, regional, area or large city with ward divisions) they generally meet less frequently than standing committees of the other local Soviets. Meetings are competent if more than half the committee's members are present. The committee's chairman and vice-chairmen preside over preparations for the meeting, and all members and activists are involved in the preparatory work. At the meetings, the committee invites activists, heads and responsible officials of those enterprises whose activity is under discussion and members of mass organisations.

Committee findings founded on the facts of discussion are formulated in resolutions or decisions. Since the standing committee is not an administrative body, its decisions are in the form of recommendations about what measures to assume or what actions organisation heads should take to remove deficiencies highlighted by the committee. The committee's authority is so high that the decisions and recom-



mendations it makes are usually carried out by the relevant officials voluntarily. It is necessary to stress that the committee can only carry out its decisions successfully if sufficient groundwork has already been made. As mentioned above, the standing committees try to involve the public in their debates. One means of doing this is to hold mobile sessions in which factory managers, Party and Komsomol secretaries, workers and office employees take part along with deputies and executive committee personnel. This has become an accepted part of the work of most standing committees today.

The range of questions examined at committee meetings is naturally confined to the competence of its appropriate Soviet and therefore includes all aspects of the Soviet's work. In the town of Petrovsk-Zabaikalsky (Chita Region in Siberia), for example, the local population voiced their serious concern with the town transport. Because the buses did not run on time, people were persistently late for work. So the Standing Committee on Municipal Services took up the problem and found that the bus timetable was not being met because of the badly-designed bus routes. The Committee proposed changing the routes, the proposal was adopted and as a result fewer people were late for work, labour discipline improved and productivity increased.

Moscow's Leningradsky Ward Soviet Standing Committee on Socialist Legality and Public Order discussed the handling of public complaints and applications in the ward internal affairs department. Committee members and activists had made a careful check on the situation prior to the meeting and invited the department chiefs, members of mass organisations and activists who had taken part in the preliminary check. The subsequent decision was therefore taken after well-considered discussion, and the recommendations helped to improve the work of the department.

Standing committees discuss items within the scope of their competence, and practically all questions of the work of local Soviets throughout their life are in one way or another examined by the committees either at their meetings or through checks and investigations. For instance, this is borne out by the following figures: for one year local government committees in Voroshilovgrad Region examined over 15,000 items, in Chernovtsy Region some 9,000 and made

5,200 investigations, and in Lvov Region more than 30,000 questions.

Of late the committees have displayed many new features. They no longer confine their activity merely to preparatory, auxiliary and supervisory functions.<sup>17</sup> In line with the Party Programme, the standing committees gradually take over more and more business currently being dealt with by the boards and departments of executive committees,<sup>18</sup> they now enjoy a greater variety of rights.\*

With the extension of their rights and expansion in their organisational activities, the standing committees are now, in fact, independently performing some of the functions of sectional administration. True, they always have had some administrative work inasmuch as supervision, mass organisation and making recommendations, which constituted their major work between sessions, are intrinsic parts of local government. Yet they had no official authority to perform those administrative functions and, therefore, played only a supporting role. Now that they are dealing with specific economic, social and cultural questions, they are taking on an entirely new character and becoming active participants in executive and administrative activity.

Given its great diversity, the process of extending the rights and enhancing the role of the standing committees nevertheless has much in common. Above all, they have increased their authority in taking over a number of functions previously performed by sectional bodies (especially at district and town level) and even by executive committees (of rural and township Soviets).\*\* These functions include

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\* The right of the committees to make binding decisions on issues passed on to them for their ultimate settlement, and on issues relating to the implementation of Soviet decisions, is defined in the Statute on Standing Committees of Regional, District, Town, Rural and Township Soviets of Working People's Deputies of Byelorussia, ratified by Decree of the Supreme Soviet Presidium of the Byelorussian Republic on May 22, 1967. See *Sbornik zakonov i ukazov Prezidiuma Verkhovnogo Sovieta BSSR, postanovleniy i rasporyazheniy Sovieta Ministrov BSSR (Collection of Laws and Decrees of the Byelorussian Supreme Soviet Presidium. Decisions and Orders of the Byelorussian Council of Ministers)*, 1967, No. 15, Item 197.

\*\* The transfer to standing committees of various functions of administrative agencies is usually done by decisions of the local Soviets. In certain cases executive committees take these decisions.

allocation of funds to financing social and cultural measures made possible by exceeding planned budget revenue; official acceptance of residential housing after major repairs; reviewing the results of socialist emulation among municipal enterprises, street and house committees; assistance to citizens in getting better housing; confirming summer health plans for children and arranging seasonal crèches and kindergartens on farms; accommodation of children in kindergartens; confirming hygiene propaganda and health measures; accommodation in invalids' homes; confirming the plans of cultural institutions, guiding voluntary councils at cultural institutions, arranging for city cultural institutions to act as patrons for rural institutions; reviewing the results of the work of cultural and educational establishments.

Another trend in their enhanced authority is to take decisions that are binding on organisations subordinate to the Soviet; these normally refer to the heads of departments, boards, organisations and establishments within the Soviet's jurisdiction on all questions relating to implementation of the decisions of the Soviets and their executive committees except amendments to the economic plans, budgets and deployment of material resources. Usually in such cases the committees have the right to give organisation heads a public censure for the tardy fulfilment of decisions taken by the Soviets and its standing committees, the matter being brought before a Soviet session.

It is only recently that the committees have acquired official authority which they may wield in supervising and dealing with various administrative problems. This is something new and important, and gives them the status of authoritative departmental agencies of local government. Their development along these lines reinforces their independence as structural parts of representative authorities. But they are not becoming executive and administrative bodies; rather they are retaining their own place in the system of local government, which is determined by the substance and size of the functions they perform. In the years to come, the committees will apparently increasingly become bodies that ensure the active involvement of deputies—and, through them, of all the electorate—in state administration.

#### GROUPS (COUNCILS) OF DEPUTIES

The deputy, the people's choice, is the principal figure in the Soviet since he represents and expresses the popular will. It is largely up to him to settle all the questions that come before the Soviet and its agencies and it is on his initiative and activity that the success of the Soviet's work hinges. He is a genuinely popular envoy and represents every walk of life, every social group, and every nationality in the USSR.

The number of deputies has increased with every election. With each new convocation, more hundreds of thousands of Soviet people graduate from the school of state administration. While 1,277,091 deputies took their seats in the 1939-elected local government bodies (first convocation), 2,165,037 did so at the thirteenth convocation in 1971. In the space of 30 years, from the first local elections after the 1936 Constitution, the number of deputies therefore increased almost by 60 per cent. In the same period (1940-70), the population grew by 47,600,000, or by 24.2 per cent (in 1940 it was 194,100,000, and in 1970 it was 241,700,000). The number of local deputies, therefore, increased two and a half times as fast as the population growth.

M. I. Kalinin once wrote: "The very number of deputies scattered about the Soviet Union, from Moscow to the most far-flung corners of the land, shows that through its deputies Soviet government can carry out, and is actually carrying out great measures. For this body, rightly speaking, covers the entire population of our country. . . . The populace that elects the deputies maintains direct links with them. These links form a direct chain from top to bottom and make Soviet government the people's own government."<sup>19</sup>

Local deputies elected in adjacent areas maintain close contact with one another since they are often confronted with common tasks and can work out and implement measures jointly. Groups of deputies are the chief organisational form of joint action based on common place of residence of constituents.\* In some towns and regions these

\* Before 1936 groups of deputies were formed both on the territorial and on the production principle. Today they are normally formed only from their constituency; very few cases exist of them being formed at factories where the deputies work.



groups are called "councils of deputies", but in practice they are the same as all blocks of deputies grouped on a territorial principle.

The activity of groups of deputies forms, along with the standing committees, part of the work of the Soviets ensuring continuity between sessions. They are also a form of mass organisation of implementing voters' instructions, of conducting day-to-day cultural and educational work among the electorate and of defending the rights and legitimate interests of the public.

Groups of deputies are based on districts within a town or a rural area: in towns they normally cover the area of a house-management office, while in rural areas they cover individual populated localities. In several towns, the boundaries of electoral precincts define the area covered by the groups of deputies. They consist of local deputies whose constituency comes within the district in which the group is set up. In towns they number 10-20 members as a rule, in the countryside 3-5 deputies elected in adjacent constituencies. Thus, in the latter case they comprise deputies of rural, district and, in some cases, regional Soviets residing in a particular locality. They comprise deputies of district, town or sometimes regional Soviets in cities with ward divisions. As a rule, district, town, ward, rural and township Soviets set them up.

They are convened by their chairman not less than once a month and must have at least half their members present to secure a quorum. All questions they decide by a simple majority of members present. Activists may also take part in the proceedings but have no vote.

In all their work the deputy groups are accountable to their Soviet, they implement its decisions, carry out its mandates, take an active part in session preparations and recommend items to be included in the agenda. They bear extensive duties in working among the electorate, largely in doing all they can to implement the decisions of local Soviets and their executive committees, and the resolutions of higher bodies; in getting the local population to display a communist attitude to state property, strictly to observe public order and the rules of socialist community living; and in supervising the activity of enterprises providing municipal and cultural amenities for their particular area.

The most important part of their duties is to carry out the voters' mandates.<sup>20</sup> This is not accidental, for under socialism the electors' mandates are a major institution of direct democracy. The purpose of the mandate is to define the concrete tasks facing Soviets and their deputies for a definite period. The mandates largely determine the content of the deputies' activity. In case of a government official violating the mandate's requirements, the voters may bring about his removal. This principle expresses the dependence of deputies and the executive apparatus on the voters. They patently show the high degree of social awareness, activity and creative initiative of the public, and their vigorous participation in running the state. Electors draft into their mandates valuable suggestions and remarks on a variety of issues concerning political, economic, social and cultural affairs. These mandates illustrate the great concern of the public for making urban and rural areas well-provided with public services and amenities, pleasant and convenient to live in, and for people to have better housing, domestic and cultural facilities. Experience shows that high on the list of voters' demands are more housing, better planning and provision of greenery for streets and play areas, more shops, canteens and cafes, public utilities, libraries, cinemas, health centres and schools.

As many as 1,245 mandates came in during preparations for and the holding of the 1969 elections to the Moscow Regional Soviet, of which there were:

- 45 on the improvement of the performance of industrial enterprises,
- 71 on the improvement of the work of agricultural enterprises,
- 61 on housing, municipal services and town planning,
- 37 on laying gas mains in populated localities,
- 125 on education,
- 115 on health,
- 78 on culture,
- 45 on trade and public catering,
- 66 on highway and road construction,
- 32 on transport and communications,
- 43 on railways,

Mandates are handed over during the election campaign when constituents meet the candidates, and when deputies report back to their constituents. Not all voters' proposals, however, are mandates; they only become mandates if they are discussed and approved by the electors and then forwarded in written form to the local Soviet executive committee where a uniform programme is drawn up and adopted by the Soviet itself.

There are cases, however, when the people's mandates cannot be fulfilled. After examining and discussing unrealistic instructions and the conditions necessary for their implementation, the Soviet may vote them down. This being the case, the Soviet instructs the deputies concerned to explain to their electors the reasons why the Soviet declined their proposals. If a meeting of electors considers the reasons to be justified, it means that it sanctions the Soviet's decision.

Irrespective of who is delegated to deal with the mandates, deputies are still responsible for seeing that they are carried out. They therefore keep a watchful eye on how administrative agencies deal with the electors' proposals, and themselves arrange them to be effected, involve the public in this work.

Another important aspect of the work of groups of deputies is receiving constituents and examining their complaints and applications. By meeting their constituents regularly deputies are able to keep abreast of their needs and demands, and to uncover and root out deficiencies in the work of various organisations, factories and offices. Groups of deputies receive constituents once or twice a week, with members of the group taking turns to be present. In towns the deputy is usually joined at the interview by the head of the local house-management office and members of local house committees. This often enables many complaints to be dealt with on the spot. More serious issues that have to be resolved collectively are passed on for the perusal of the entire group. Deputies arrange meetings at a place convenient to constituents—in the local Soviet executive committee building, at the house-management

office in the constituents' area, at factories, offices, building sites, state farms, etc. Moreover, every constituent is completely at liberty to meet his deputy on receiving day (and often on other days, too) and to appeal to him for help in resolving a particular issue, whether private or public.

Since the groups of deputies came into being, the procedure for reporting back to electors has changed somewhat, so that in the districts where groups of deputies exist each deputy separately and the group as a whole now report to voters on their work.

The groups are vested with extensive powers, being able to supervise the work of all enterprises, offices and organisations subordinate to the local Soviets. Those establishments that are not subordinate may only be checked in relation to their fulfilment of housing plans, provision of amenities and cultural and domestic services. In carrying out their inspection, the groups have the authority to demand documents, materials and explanations from heads of organisations subordinate to the local Soviet, and to hear their reports on questions that fall within the group's competence. They also have the right, jointly with voluntary organisations, to summon public meetings to discuss the use of housing, town planning, organisation of mass cultural work, and to take part in the work of production and other meetings at the local establishments that are subordinate to local Soviets.

Further, they take part in drawing up the economic and financial plans of the local house-management offices, in supervising the building of houses and provision of social amenities, overhaul and running house repairs, and they examine applications from the public for better housing.

The group of deputies in the village of Khoromy (Novgorod Region) resides some 30 kilometres from the village Soviet's centre. It encompasses an area that includes a team of the Rodina collective farm, a local branch of the government Board for the Supply of Farm Machinery, Fuel and Fertiliser, two clubs, a school, a hospital, two shops, a bakery and a post office. The group contains eight deputies. They discussed local shops, a school parents' committee, and invited the parents of truants to their meeting to find out why their children had been missing school.



All the locally-resident deputies to the Shapkinovskiy village Soviet in Tambov Region are members of its group of deputies. They helped the club director to provide cultural services for the local population, discussed and took part in preparations for the new school session, arranged children's nurseries, and supervised the work of a local shop. The group receives the public twice a week, sorts out applications and complaints that villagers had earlier sent to the executive committee: some questions are dealt with on the spot, and others have to be forwarded to the village Soviet executive committee.

The council of deputies attached to the house-management office No. 26 in one of Moscow's wards has two deputies from the Moscow City Soviet and six from the Ward Soviet. Each of them is in charge of a specific aspect of work: trade, overhaul and running housing repairs, schools, medical service, etc. As elsewhere, their main job is to see that voters' mandates are carried out, for which purpose they have control over the quality of house repairs, had gas mains laid in the ward, new shops opened, investigated and improved the work of all trade enterprises, and set up a medical unit.

In recent years, where in the countryside it has been impossible to establish groups of deputies *voluntary rural committees* have come into being. These comprise deputies living in the given rural locality and activists, and in many cases the activists outnumber the deputies. They are elected at a local public meeting and are accountable to that meeting, to the rural and township Soviet and to its executive committee. Their job is to help rural and township Soviets do their work, involve themselves in improving social amenities in their area, the provision of cultural facilities and housing, village planning, arrange educational work among the local populace, and offer assistance to schools, medical establishments and retail organisations. Particularly important is their aid to collective-farm teams and livestock departments in fulfilling the undertakings they have made and in buying up produce surplus from the local population.

These committees rely in their work on local farmers, are closely associated with them, render accounts on their work, mobilise the community to carry out the decisions of the

Soviets, and sponsor *subbotniki* (voluntary unpaid work on Saturdays) or *voskresniki* (voluntary unpaid work on Sundays).

A rural committee functioning on a voluntary basis is entitled to hold rallies of local residents on behalf of the Soviet's Executive Committee or on its own initiative and to submit proposals for the regular agenda of a rural Soviet. The voluntary committee may hear explanations given by persons who have breached public order, violated sanitary or fire regulations and then put forth proposals for discussion at common rallies. Requests made by rural committees are examined by Executive Committees, heads of enterprises, institutions and organisations within a period of two weeks.

#### LOCAL GOVERNMENT EXECUTIVE AND ADMINISTRATIVE AGENCIES

##### EXECUTIVE COMMITTEES

Pursuant to Art. 99 of the USSR Constitution, executive committees are the administrative agencies of territorial, regional, autonomous regional, district, town, ward, rural and township Soviets of Working People's Deputies. A local Soviet elects its executive committee at the first session of every new convocation by open voting and a simple majority of deputies present. Only deputies of that particular Soviet can serve on the executive committee. If need be, a Soviet may at any session make changes to the committee by electing new members, recalling others from the committee, or even completely renewing the whole committee. No other state body (neither a higher Soviet and its executive committee, nor the executive committee in question) is vested with such sweeping powers.

The Soviet decides the size and composition of its executive committee; as a rule executive committees of territorial and regional Soviets have 15-21 deputies, of cities of republican subordination up to 25 deputies, of towns of district and regional subordination between 9 and 15 deputies, district 7-11 deputies, and rural and township 5-7 deputies. Membership is open to deputies with more experience and initiative, and who are experts in various economic and cultural spheres. They often include the heads

of leading departments and boards of the executive committee.

How well-informed executive committee members are may be judged by the growing number of members with higher or secondary educational qualifications. At the 1961 polls, 17.8 per cent of members had had a higher education, and 35 per cent had had a secondary education. Eight years later, in 1969, the figures were 24.2 per cent and 45.3 per cent respectively, which shows that the standard of general and specialised qualification of leading officials is steadily growing; that has a beneficial effect on the work of the Soviets and their executive committees.

During the term of the respective Soviets, the executive committees direct the social, cultural and economic affairs of their area on the basis of decisions made by Soviets and higher state bodies and in conformity with the constitutions of Union and Autonomous Republics. They also co-ordinate and direct the work of their own departments and boards and, in between Soviet sessions, release and appoint department and board chiefs, putting forward their proposals to the approval of the Soviets. Further, they take steps to see that the economic plans and local budgets are carried out, to protect civil rights and law and order, to ensure that the public and the organisations obey the laws, and to strengthen Soviet defence. They superintend the development of local industry, make sure that subordinate enterprises fulfil their production quotas, economise on raw materials, fuel and electricity, pass measures to raise productivity, improve quality and reduce production costs.

In agriculture, they see that collective farms create and make rational use of their non-distributable assets, see that farmers abide by the collective-farm rules, that farms improve their economic organisation and farming methods, that farmers have a material interest in working harder, and that their living and housing conditions improve.

In their work for better housing, they discuss plans for building towns, townships and villages, approve housing construction plans and see that the state plans for building houses are completed on time. With the help of the public, they also allocate accommodation in the blocks of flats belonging to local Soviets, approve lists and give the go-ahead for people to move into new homes built by various

enterprises and organisations. They also manage public utilities: water, sewage, gas, heating and electricity, trams, buses and other types of town transport, hairdressers', hotels and laundries; they plan, direct and supervise the work of all these concerns, and deal with questions appertaining to their functioning.

Another important aspect of their work is local retail trade. They take steps to expand the trade and public catering networks, confirm trade turnover plans, campaign for high standards in trade and social services, and ensure that trading centres are properly deployed over the town's territory. They also enjoy extensive powers in the provision of cultural and social services, being in charge of health organisations that provide the community with free medical aid, striving to extend the health centres and improve the work of hospitals, surgeries, dispensaries and other health institutions.

In the field of law and order, they safeguard socialist property and state interests, and examine complaints about improper and illegal actions by state officials. They also do a great deal of work in the sphere of social security and public welfare.

Executive committees summon sessions of Soviets and see to it that deputies are able to give informed and undivided consideration to questions that arise, to make their observations and suggestions, put forward questions to the executive bodies and economic directors, and receive exhaustive answers from them. Furthermore, they arrange for the Soviet's decisions to be carried out and give assistance to standing committees.

Article 101 of the USSR Constitution puts the executive committees of local Soviets under the dual control of their own Soviets and of the executive committees of the higher Soviets. The latter's decisions are binding on the lower executive committee and its own decisions may be revoked by its own Soviet or a higher executive committee.

Direct responsibility and accountability of the executive committees to the Soviets are a manifestation of the way administrative and executive functions are combined in the Soviets, and of the supreme power of the representative organs of authority. The reports given by the executive committees are an effective means by which the Soviets can



control their activity and the implementation of decisions taken by the Soviet. During the reports, errors and deficiencies in the work of the executive apparatus are uncovered and measures are outlined for removing them so as to improve the functioning of the administrative bodies. These reports are delivered by most local Soviets regularly, not less than once a year. Suffice it to say that in 1969, as many as 49,108 executive committees, or 98.9 per cent of the total, reported at Soviet sessions.

Executive committees are increasingly becoming accountable directly to the electorate. In the words of the Party Programme, "the principle of accountability to representative bodies and to the electorate will be gradually extended to all the leading officials of state bodies".<sup>24</sup> Many local Soviets have begun to make regular reports directly to the electorate; these are made either by executive committees, or by heads of departments, boards, establishments and organisations of trade, public catering, health, municipal and welfare services, and culture. In 1969 alone executive committees gave 207,400 reports at public meetings at which about 37,400,000 people were present. Thus, nearly one quarter of the adult population of the country personally heard about the work of local authorities and the problems they were dealing with. Furthermore, hundreds of thousands of people put forward critical comments and suggestions, thereby involving themselves in administrative affairs.

By their mode of formation and nature of operation, the executive committees are agencies of collective leadership, inasmuch as they deal collectively at their meetings with all issues of paramount importance that come within their competence. But to direct the various aspects of their work they make a clear-cut division of responsibility among their members. The chairman is responsible for calling and conducting meetings, overall supervision of the work of its planning bodies, finance and budgetary business, selection and deployment of staff, for checking the implementation of decisions made by the Soviet and higher government bodies. He superintends the work of the executive committee and bears personal responsibility for it.

His vice-chairmen are in charge of groups of departments or certain branches of state administration like, for exam-

ple, local industry, agriculture, social and cultural affairs. The executive committee secretary is responsible for preparations for sessions of the Soviet and meetings of the executive committee, he helps the standing committees and deputies, supervises the work of general purposes, organisation and instruction departments (the organisation and instruction group), and the receiving office of the executive committee.

The principal methods used by the executive committee in carrying out these jobs involve direct administration, supervision, instruction and observation of the activities of non-subordinate organisations. Direct administration signifies the executive committee taking specific decisions on running local economic, social and cultural affairs. It does this by collectively dealing with questions and then allowing its chairman, vice-chairmen, secretary and ordinary members individually to see the work through. Supervision refers specifically to subordinate bodies of sectional administration (departments, boards, enterprises, offices, organisations) and to executive committees of lower Soviets. Instruction entails taking appropriate decisions which summarise advanced experience when executive committee leading officials and staff members go into the localities, holding conferences for exchange of experience and arranging for local government officials to improve their qualifications. Observation of the work of non-subordinate organisations within the committee's area is carried out without tampering with their functions and is confined to social and cultural amenities for employees, the observance of socialist legality and civil liberties, proper production conditions, and labour production and safety standards.

Executive committee meetings are the organisational form of collective discussion and settlement of all major questions that fall within their powers. They meet 2-4 times every month to examine all manner of important issues relating to local industry, agriculture, culture, trade and public catering, public order and civil liberties, the implementation of earlier decisions, and reports of administrative agencies subordinate to the Soviet and lower executive committees.

Questions are normally prepared by officials of the particular department responsible for the issue to be debated.

Standing committees, deputies and activists also join in preparation of the question, with a vice-chairman or the secretary being usually in charge of preparations. If it is a standing committee that has put forward the question, then the committee itself prepares it. That is precisely how preparations went for a meeting of the executive committee of the Astrakhan Regional Soviet. It commenced precisely at the appointed time with executive committee members joined by chiefs of various factories and offices, and by members of the regional board of culture whose work was about to be discussed. The Regional Soviet's standing committee on education and culture had spent more than a month studying the work of theatres, libraries, houses of popular creative endeavour and a philharmonic society. Initial discussion of results of the investigations had taken place in the committee itself, then on the board. That is precisely why the executive committee was able to discuss all the principal aspects of the work of cultural establishments in the region and arrive at a business-like decision.

The Dmitrov Town Soviet (Moscow Region) undertook the study of a long-term (1971-1975) plan for sanitary measures long before the date of its session was set. The preparations were carried out by the town Soviet's Health Standing Committee, deputies, heads of public health institutions and activists in general. They made a thorough study of the work of the various medical institutions, of preventive measures, working conditions and workers' rest and leisure. This enabled the Soviet to compile a plan which fully met the needs of the population.

The executive committee meetings are attended by deputies who are not on the executive committee and by members of the factories and organisations concerned. They all have the right to speak but not to vote. Meetings take place as a rule in the executive committee building, but of late meetings have been held in factories, farms and various residential areas so that optimum publicity could be given to their work. When the executive committee does move out and about it invites local residents to take part in its meetings. Decisions become valid by an open majority vote of executive committee members present at the meeting.

In addition to decisions adopted collectively, the executive committee issues orders which, in contrast to decisions, are

made personally by its chairman and signed by him. It issues such orders with the purpose of flexible guidance of economic and cultural matters and, normally, on matters which the executive committee has already resolved in principle and which simply need clarification.

Another important aspect of the work of executive committees is arranging for implementation of decisions and control over their implementation. This control takes various forms: by means of on-the-spot investigations, hearing reports at executive committee meetings on fulfilment of adopted decisions and resolutions, receiving information from those who carry out the decisions and hearing their speeches.

A further major sector of day-to-day activity involves supervising departments and boards and also executive committees of lower Soviets. Higher executive committees do a great deal of work in improving the mass organisation by lower executive committees. To these ends, they regularly see that lower Soviets are convened on time, prepared properly, that they and their executive committees make regular reports to the electorate, and that voters' mandates are being carried out. They also see that lower executive committees widely involve the public in the work of the Soviet.

The most important feature of relations between higher and lower executive committees is the practical assistance which the higher gives the lower. They do so by analysing deficiencies in the latter's work, jointly elaborating measures to deal with them, apportioning the necessary finance and material resources, and holding special consultations, seminars and regular study sessions for lower-level officials. Often they form teams and groups of deputies and their most experienced personnel to give assistance to the lower executive committees.

Executive committees put great store by their work in dealing with letters, complaints and applications from the public. Oral and written appeals from the public help to pinpoint shortcomings in the work of state bodies, breaches of the law and the rights of Soviet citizens, or illegitimate actions by individual officials. These citizens' letters and applications frequently bring to light improvements in the work of factories and offices, tightening state discipline and



public order, and improving the provision of social and cultural facilities.

Executive committees arrange visits from citizens so that everyone has a chance to air his particular question; the public has daily access to executive committee staff (heads of departments, executive committee instructors, legal adviser) and to sectional departments and boards. In cases where certain questions cannot be handled by executive committee officials, citizens may take their problems to one of the executive committee heads. Visitors are received in turn by the chairman, vice-chairmen or secretary of the executive committee on certain days of the week. Reception takes place normally in a special reception room of the executive committee building or in the office of one of its leading officials.

Executive committees of district and rural Soviets go out to meet the public in areas far from the administrative centre, to factories and building sites; regional executive committees meet the public in district centres. In these cases, they inform the public beforehand where and when they will be receiving them. Such direct contacts serve to strengthen the links between the executive committees and the public, and help to eliminate bureaucracy in the state apparatus. By fixing the times of receiving the public they ensure that anyone can meet an executive committee official.

One of the more recent features of Soviet state practice in safeguarding civil liberties and coping more effectively with complaints and applications from the public is the USSR Supreme Soviet Presidium Ordinance on Procedure for Handling Suggestions, Applications and Complaints from the Public, passed on April 12, 1968.<sup>22</sup> The Ordinance establishes a clear-cut procedure and time-limit by which the matters must be dealt within one month, while those not requiring additional investigation must be dealt with straightaway or not later than fifteen days after their receipt. Only in the event of a special investigation or extra documents being needed may complaints or applications from the public have their examination period extended, but by no more than one month. The Ordinance further establishes the disciplinary responsibility for officials found guilty of violating the procedure, of red tape or bureaucracy. If such actions cause substantial harm to state or social

interests or to civil liberties, or if officials are found to have persecuted any citizens in connection with their complaints or applications, the guilty party is liable to criminal prosecution.

Further, complaints and applications that come in for examination should not be sent for verification to the people against whom the complaints have been made. The Ordinance calls on executive committees to improve publicity about the handling of public complaints and applications, to involve deputies and activists in their examination, and, when necessary, to arrange discussions at staff meetings in factories, offices and organisations and at places of residence so as to broadcast widely results of complaints that have public significance. They are also obliged regularly to check on the handling of such matters in departments and boards, in factories, offices and organisations within the area of their Soviets, and to take steps to eradicate all causes for infringements of civil rights and public interests. Leading officials of the executive committees are ultimately responsible for direct supervision of the handling of complaints and applications from the public.

#### EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE DEPARTMENTS AND BOARDS

The executive committee's auxiliary apparatus greatly assists the Soviet and its executive committee by conducting mass organisational work, by helping the standing committees, groups of deputies and individual deputies in their handling of citizens' letters, complaints and applications. The size and structure of the auxiliary apparatus depends on the level of the Soviet, on local conditions and the number of people inhabiting the area covered by the Soviet. The organisation and instruction apparatus commands a key place among the auxiliary subdivisions of the executive committee. At territorial, regional and city levels there exist organisation and instruction departments or similar sections of Soviet bodies; at district and town levels there are instruction groups or merely instructors in mass organisation work. The apparatus helps the Soviet and its executive committee to prepare sessions and EC meetings, and direct the activity of lower Soviets. On EC instructions the

organisation departments check on how citizens' complaints are being dealt with in the various EC departments and boards, supervise the implementation of government enactments and acts of other higher bodies, and the decisions of the Soviet and its executive committee. Further, they gather and sum up the advanced experience of local government, and all information and statistics concerning the composition and work of lower Soviets, standing committees, deputies and activists.

General purposes departments carry out the principal functions of providing organisational and technical service for the Soviet and its executive committee. They do office work, look after the executive committee's correspondence, receive the complaints and applications from the public, keep account of them, arrange for the reception of visitors, and issue various certificates to the public. Moreover, they see that the public's suggestions, complaints and applications are dealt with promptly by the executive committee; they duplicate and send out all the necessary documents and inform deputies, EC members and invited officials about the day and time of meetings. Legal advisers normally work with the general purposes departments and are responsible for receiving the public, giving advice on points of law, and providing a legal opinion on the legality of EC draft decisions.

Executive committees also have sectional departments and boards to superintend the various branches of state administration. Their number and type vary from Soviet to Soviet, and depend on the complexity and size of the tasks and economic peculiarities prevailing in that particular Soviet's area. Union and Autonomous republican constitutions enumerate these departments and boards and lay down the powers the Soviets have in forming them. Territorial and regional Soviets may set up, for example, departments on health, municipal services, education, construction and architecture, social security and finance; and boards on culture, local industry, meat and dairy products, internal affairs, building materials industry, agriculture, construction and repair of roads, retail trade, etc.

All departments and boards are subordinate to their respective Soviet and its executive committee, and to the department of the same name of the higher executive com-

mittee. Departments and boards of territorial and regional Soviets, however, come under the appropriate republican ministries. Local Soviets and their executive committees direct their sectional departments and boards by defining their general functions, supervising their work, requesting reports and information on how they are carrying out decisions adopted at Soviet sessions and EC meetings, and arranging all manner of checks and investigations. The executive committees are responsible for the day-to-day running of the sectional administrative bodies.

Industrial workers, farmers, office employees and engineers take part in the work of administrative bodies as voluntary inspectors and instructors. They are enlisted to check on various offices and organisations, sort out complaints and applications from the public, and prepare draft decisions. By doing so they are helping to extend the organisational work of administrative bodies and making their activities more effective. The submission of major political, economic, social and cultural questions for consideration at meetings in enterprises, institutions and organisations and also at places of residence is one of the forms of the people's participation in the work of Soviets. One example of this public involvement that is becoming quite widespread is the voluntary councils attached to executive committees of local Soviets. They are set up whenever it is necessary to enlist the public's help in sectors for which there is no EC department or which requires the co-ordinated efforts of the mass organisations operating within the Soviet's area. Thus, for example, there are councils for the work of comrades' courts, councils for co-ordinating the work of street and house committees and councils of voluntary trade inspectors.

In addition, executive committees of district and town Soviets set up departments for retail trade, mass organisational work, culture and others which do not have full-time officials. They have gained broad public recognition. In 1969, the ECs of local Soviets had 8,306 part-time departments with 77,324 activists doing unpaid voluntary work.

Activists who do voluntary work in administrative bodies provide invaluable assistance. Another way for the public to participate in the work of local government agencies is through mass organisations. These bring a variety of ques-



tions of general and local importance to the notice of the Soviets, and have a hand in formulating questions to be put before the Soviet sessions. Not infrequently Soviets set up commissions jointly with mass organisations: trade unions, the Komsomol, DOSAAF (the Voluntary Society for Assisting the Armed Forces), associations of artists, writers, composers, journalists, etc. Such commissions come into being, for example, when the Soviet wishes to conduct various mass campaigns or public reviews. The mass organisations help to see that the public and officials abide by laws and Party and government resolutions, decisions of local Soviets and their executive committees, and voters' mandates. They do this work both by means of checks and investigations jointly with the Soviets, and by instituting mass control over the activity of administrative bodies, widely propagating Soviet laws and involving activists in implementing measures passed by the Soviets.

Other mass initiative organisations—street and house committees, parents' committees in schools, voluntary councils of shops, health institutions and clubs—also greatly assist local Soviets, who rely on them in their daily activity, aware that they involve many millions of activists. If all the multifarious forms of popular initiative are taken into consideration, it is apparent that virtually the whole adult population takes part in one way or another in running the Soviet state, in managing its affairs, big and small.

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Engels, *Anti-Dühring*, M., 1969, p. 351.

<sup>2</sup> V. I. Lenin, *Collected Works*, Vol. 5, p. 154.

<sup>3</sup> *The Enactments of the RSFSR*, 1917, No. 12, Art. 179.

<sup>4</sup> A. I. Lepyoshkin, *Soviety—vlast' trudyashchikhsya, 1917-36 (The Soviets—Government of the Working People, 1917-36)*, M., 1966, p. 323.

<sup>5</sup> R. S. Pavlovsky, M. A. Shafir, *Administrativno-territorialnoye ustroystvo Sovetskogo gosudarstva (Administrative-Territorial Structure of the Soviet State)*, Gosyurizdat, M., 1961, p. 34.

<sup>6</sup> *KPSS v resolyutsiyakh i resheniyakh... (CPSU in Resolutions and Decisions...)*, Gospolitizdat, M., Issue 7, Part 1, p. 720.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. 1, p. 719.

<sup>8</sup> V. I. Lenin, *Collected Works*, Vol. 20, pp. 50-51.

<sup>9</sup> A. F. Yugai, *Priroda i pravovoye polozheniye avtonomnykh Sovetskikh sotsialisticheskikh respublik v sisteme Soyuz SSR. Uchoniye zapiski Saratovskogo yuridicheskogo instituta (The Legal Status of the Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republics in the USSR. Transactions of the Saratov Juridical Institute)*, Issue II, 1952, p. 45.

<sup>10</sup> See, for example, *Polozheniye o vyborakh v krayevye, oblastniye, okruzhniye, raionniye, gorodskiye, selskiye i poselkoviye Soviety deputatov trudyashchikhsya RSFSR (Regulations Governing Election to Territorial, Regional, Area, District, Town, Rural and Township Soviets of Working People's Deputies of the RSFSR)*, Gosyurizdat, M., 1965.

<sup>11</sup> *The Road to Communism*, p. 550.

<sup>12</sup> *Pravda*, March 11, 1967.

<sup>13</sup> For further details see V. I. Chkhikvadze, *State, Democracy and Legality*, Progress Publishers, M., 1971.

<sup>14</sup> *Vedomosti Verkhovnogo Sovieta RSFSR*, 1962, No. 9, Art. 121.

<sup>15</sup> Art. 4 of the USSR Supreme Soviet Presidium Ordinance On the Basic Rights and Duties of Rural and Township Soviets of Working People's Deputies, in *Vedomosti Verkhovnogo Sovieta SSSR*, 1968, No. 16, p. 131.

<sup>16</sup> *Vedomosti Verkhovnogo Sovieta SSSR*, 1968, No. 16 Art. 132.

<sup>17</sup> I. M. Chekharin, *Postoyanniye komissii mestnykh Sovietov (Local Soviet Standing Committees)*, 1966; G. V. Atamanchuk, *Rol postoyannykh komissii v osushchestvlenii funktsii mestnykh Sovietov (The Role of Standing Committees in Implementing the Functions of Local Soviets)*, 1968, No. 3.

<sup>18</sup> *The Road to Communism*, p. 550.

<sup>19</sup> M. I. Kalinin, *Voprosy Sovetskogo stroitelstva (Problems of Soviet Development)*, Gospolitizdat, M., p. 678.

<sup>20</sup> V. F. Kotok, *Nakazy izbiratelyei v sotsialisticheskoy gosudarstve (Voters' Mandates in a Socialist State)*, Nauka, 1967.

<sup>21</sup> *The Road to Communism*, p. 551.

<sup>22</sup> *Vedomosti Verkhovnogo Sovieta SSSR*, 1968, No. 17, Item 144.

## CONCLUSION

The preceding chapters have described how socialist state agencies work solely in the interests of the working people. For the first time in history socialism has made it really possible for the common people to express their will through state agencies. Soviet practice has confirmed that the very social nature of the Soviets as agencies of state authority assures their profound democracy. They are widely representative bodies, the state form of co-operation between workers, farmers and intellectuals, spearheaded by the working class. Furthermore, they embody the community of all Soviet nations and nationalities. It is the Soviets that make it possible to reveal the many-sided interests of all social groups, to launch discussions on the various affairs of state, to weigh up the many opinions and arrive at the best solution.

Soviet government had always expressed the popular interest but, as Lenin pointed out in 1919, it was initially exercised only by the most politically conscious section of the public. Over the past half century the number of people involved in running the state has increased immeasurably. The present book has attempted to show that the Soviets are not run by professional parliamentarians but by ordinary working people who, even after their election, continue to work at their factory bench, on the farm, or at their office desk. As he performs the duties of high office, the Soviet deputy lives and works among the people who sent him to the Soviet. This further enables the elected bodies to express the popular will, constantly to check on the expediency of the decisions they take, and to know how they are being implemented in practice and people's opinions of them.

The Soviets are essentially mass organisations because they represent all sections of the population and involve

dozens of millions of people in their work voluntarily and without payment. These social and state principles of Soviet organisation and activity are inseparable. The closer the Soviets are associated with the public, the more successful they are in pursuing their mission as agencies of state authority.

Soviet government put an end once and for all to the dichotomy and schism between state authority and local self-government. Every link in the Soviet system deals with its own particular range of issues, but at the same time every Soviet, from republic down to local level, takes part in enforcing the single state authority. A paramount conclusion that can be made from our examination of the Soviets is that under socialism local and national interests do not conflict; they do, in fact, merge harmoniously. The Soviets, by their social nature, organisational structure, their mass, all-embracing character and their wide powers, possess immense scope for permanent and decisive popular participation in running national and local affairs, and for consistently exercising socialist popular rule.

There is much that is new today in the work of the Soviets. After all, a wind of economic and cultural change has swept through the entire land over the past fifty-odd Soviet years, and many issues that had earlier seemed to have purely local significance have now shifted to the national plane. They frequently require quite comprehensive decisions on a republican or country-wide scale. This is a logical consequence of the progress of large-scale socialist production, when local industry has become more and more intertwined with the corresponding sectors of the national economy. In such circumstances there is a natural trend towards the local Soviets taking more responsibility in dealing with local, republican and even national problems. That is why it is so important for Soviets to use all their great advantages to make full use of the rights accorded them by the Constitution and current legislation. Their regular activities indicate that many local government bodies are successfully coping with the tasks involved in building the material and technical basis of communism, further improving the people's welfare and consolidating the Soviet Union's might.

At the same time the experience has demonstrated the need for a further extension of the powers of local Soviets,



further delimitation of the competence of the Soviets at each level and a more precise definition of the functions and powers of each Soviet and its executive bodies. That was the purpose of the new legislative enactments on the rural and township Soviets adopted in 1968 and on the district and town Soviets adopted in 1971. In recent years other major steps have been taken to enhance the role of the Soviets, to reinforce them financially and materially, and to replenish their apparatus with qualified personnel.

The activities of local Soviets, of the republican Supreme Soviets and the Soviet Parliament have become more varied. This has been reflected in the extension of their legislative functions and in greater control by the Supreme Soviet of the USSR and the Supreme Soviets of the constituent republics over the work of ministries and departments, over major sectors of the economy and culture. The increased number of standing committees, and better planning of their activity have enabled deputies to display more initiative and delve more deeply into the work of executive bodies, to participate more energetically in drafting bills.

The 24th CPSU Congress held in 1971 is a great historical event, for it has marked a new important stage in the further advance of Soviet society towards communism. The Congress defined the main task of a new, ninth five-year plan in the following terms: to ensure a considerable upswing of the people's material and cultural standards on the basis of high growth rates of socialist production, its enhanced efficiency, scientific and technological progress and accelerated growth of labour productivity.

As compared with all the previous five-year plans which were successfully implemented by the Soviet people, the ninth five-year plan, whose directives were approved by the 24th CPSU Congress, is stamped by the grandeur of the tasks outlined and the exclusive envelopment of all the major aspects of life in socialist society. The Congress adopted a broad system of social measures aimed at improving the well-being of all strata of the population, at the convergency of living conditions in town and countryside, at creating more favourable conditions for labour and recreation, at the all-round development of Soviet people's abilities and creative endeavour, at the education of the rising generation.

Socialist democracy is steadily developing and improving. The 24th Party Congress indicated that the work of building communism is inseparable from the comprehensive development of socialist democracy, the improvement of the functioning of Soviets, which form the basis of the Soviet state and most fully embody its democratic nature.

The 24th Congress emphasised that "the Soviets must fulfil their functions more fully and exercise more effective influence on the development of the economy and culture, the improvement of the people's well-being and deal more persistently with the problems of providing social services to the population and safeguarding public order".

The extension of the local Soviet powers and the specification of their authority are an important step in developing socialist democracy. But besides extending their powers, it is highly important to promote the forms of organisation by which these powers are exercised. In particular this is linked with the need to raise the standing of Soviet sessions, stimulate the work of their standing committees, ensure that deputies regularly report back to their constituents, i.e., consistently develop and improve all the organisational means of the Soviets in performing the functions of state agencies.

The Soviets' activity is not confined to holding sessions, however important they may be. Between sessions, the work is continued by the Supreme Soviet Presidium, local Soviet executive and standing committees. Deputies also help to maintain the continuity of Soviet work in between sessions. As we have seen, they do not merely express the thoughts and demands of the electorate, they are also the vehicles of Soviet decisions at grass-roots, and mobilise the public to have the decisions carried out. That their responsibility is growing may be judged particularly from their increasing reporting back to their constituents. The public is also making more demands on their deputies, as is evident from voters' mandates, bringing outstanding issues to the notice of deputies, and from recalling deputies who the public believe to have broken their trust.

The report made by L. I. Brezhnev, General Secretary of the Party, at the 24th Congress highlighted the need to draft a special law that would define the legal status, powers and rights of deputies—from township to Supreme

Soviets, and also the duties of officials with regard to deputies. "It seems to us that the passage of such a law would enhance the authority and activity of deputies."<sup>1</sup>

In emphasising the organisational role of the Soviets, their committees and deputies, it is important to mention the state administrative bodies that function under the direction and control of the Soviets. To a large degree they determine whether the country's resources are used correctly and whether welfare and cultural amenities are provided promptly. Quite clearly, even if the sessions operated daily, they could not cope directly with all state business because it is too large. In any case there is no need to try. The Soviets are broad representative bodies which consider issues that have major public importance and really do require collective debate. Besides enhancing the role of the Soviets, it is, therefore, necessary also to streamline the work of administrative bodies subordinate to them, to raise their efficiency and smooth operation, to stimulate every state establishment to display the utmost care for the needs of people, respect for, and goodwill to, the man, and to get all officials to strictly abide by law.

It must be noted that the decisions of the 24th Party Congress broadly reflected the problems arising in the work of Soviets and the need to improve administration as a whole. The Congress emphasised that more demands were being made on the administrative apparatus. The introduction of modern methods and means of management provides the requisite conditions for a more rational organisation of the administrative apparatus, for making it cheaper and for the reduction of its staffs, and for raising the responsibility of the administrative bodies to the Soviets.

The tremendous importance of the state apparatus in socialist society makes it even more topical to select, deploy and train specialists. Today the Soviet Union has inexhaustible opportunities for all government and non-government organisations and economic bodies to be headed by able organisers well versed in their particular fields, enjoying the confidence of the people, closely connected with them and relying in their work on the support of the general public. This means that the Soviets must do more to train specialists, supervise the work of administrative bodies and their

heads and make officials more accountable to the people. In that respect it is good to see administrative bodies delivering more reports on their work to Supreme and local Soviet sessions. By debating these reports, deputies help to uncover deficiencies in the work of administration and put the situation right. Another innovation that has justified itself is the practice of deputies availing themselves of the right to put questions to all officials, since that brings the administrative apparatus more under Soviet control.

Executive committees and other administrative bodies are also reporting on their work more frequently to the public and, therefore, steadily improving the various democratic forms of control. In a variety of ways the Soviets and their subordinate bodies are drawing the public and numerous activists into state affairs. State bodies jointly with mass organisations are performing several administrative functions.

One of the principal means of encouraging socialist democracy is to promote all forms of public independent action in Soviet agencies. Involving the public in administration is utterly imperative if the Soviet apparatus is to operate successfully, but it can only do so effectively if independent initiative is flexibly blended with the constant activity of that apparatus.

The Soviet Communist Party directs the entire work of the Soviets; Party organisations constantly guide the Soviets and give them all possible help and support. The Party acts as the guiding and directing force of Soviet society. Being the vanguard of the people, it regards stronger Soviets as an important means of consolidating its influence over the whole process of building communism. Since it is the highest form of socio-political organisation and the collective leader of the Soviet people, it guides all Soviet life, all other organisations, pooling and co-ordinating their efforts towards the common goal. It is a regular feature of socialist development that the role of the Party should grow, inasmuch as it has to deal with the increased scope and complexity of issues involved in transforming society, the enhanced popular initiative and the extension of socialist democracy.

The Party relies on more than the experience and vital strength of its members when it draws up and implements



its policy. It also uses all the mass organisations that link it with non-Party members. The fact that the Soviets represent the public at large and operate in the midst of the people causes the Party to see that their work corresponds to the lofty demands made upon them, and that they debate and deal with key state problems in a business-like way. Party leadership is a *sine qua non* for state bodies to express the popular will. The Party carries out its leading role in society through a system of government and non-government organisations, combines and directs their efforts towards the common goal by employing various methods of organisation and ideological work. It does all it can to activate the Soviets, upholds their initiative, constantly concerns itself with selecting and nominating the personnel for work in the Soviets, with abiding by and furthering the principles of socialist democracy, with the strictest observance of legality and the legal education of people. Lenin used to say that the Party runs state affairs not apart from but through the Soviets and other state agencies, and this Leninist precept has been reaffirmed time and again in Party congress decisions and Central Committee resolutions. Greater Party leadership of Soviets, therefore, does not in any way imply the replacement of state by Party bodies.

Any description of the work of the Soviets requires a clear appreciation of prospects for their development which is inevitably bound up with the future of the socialist state, or rather with the growth of the socialist state system into public communist self-administration. The principal distinction between the socialist and exploiting types of state consists not simply in the former's genuine democracy, but also in that it is the highest and last historical type of state. The founders of Marxism showed that the state does not last forever. Just as at a certain stage of historical development of society the state was bound to appear, so it will just as inevitably disappear at another stage of social development when the necessary conditions mature.

The growth of the state system on the way to communism, Lenin wrote in *The State and Revolution*, will lead to the gradual creation of "an order under which the functions of control and accounting, becoming more and more simple, will be performed by each in turn, will then become a habit

and will finally die out as the *special* functions of a special section of the population".<sup>2</sup>

To understand the law-governed process of the withering away of the state, one must bear in mind external as well as internal factors. As long as imperialism exists there remains the threat of piratical wars, the danger of an attack on one or another of the socialist states or on the entire socialist community. Marxists-Leninists, therefore, relate the question of the withering away of the state to the international situation. In the words of the Party Programme, "To ensure that the state withers away completely, it is necessary to provide both internal conditions—the building of a developed communist society—and external conditions—the victory and consolidation of socialism in the world arena."<sup>3</sup>

The withering away of the state is an intricate, protracted and gradual process that occurs as changes take place in social conditions and people's minds. Lenin made a special point of underlining its protracted nature, made it dependent upon the rapidity of development of the higher phase of communism, and strongly condemned any subjectivism and undue haste in this matter.<sup>4</sup>

The future system of communist public self-administration will come about if socialist democracy is comprehensively promoted, if more and more of the public are drawn into state administration, if the structure and working methods of government agencies are drawn closer to those of non-government organisations, if the latter take a constantly increasing part in performing state functions, and if people display higher moral standards in their relations towards society and among themselves. That is the way to foster and strengthen the shoots of future communist administration of community affairs, of the highly-organised public self-administration in which democratic principles and ideals will be most fully and consistently implemented.

Hence the need, in particular, to consolidate and perfect the democratic principles that underlie the activity of the Soviets. There lies the guarantee of growing creative strength of the socialist state of the whole people, the guarantee of fresh successes for the Soviet people in their efforts to build communism.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> *Report of the CPSU Central Committee to the 24th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union*, Novosti Press Agency Publishing House, Moscow, 1971, p. 129.

<sup>2</sup> V. I. Lenin, *Collected Works*, Vol. 25, p. 426.

<sup>3</sup> *The Road to Communism*, p. 556.

<sup>4</sup> V. I. Lenin, *Collected Works*, Vol. 25, p. 469.

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